

The Alchemists

by

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Based on a true story

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FADE IN :

EXT. MANSION ESTATE -FULL MOON SUMMER NIGHT (ESTABLISHING)

A WOLF HOWLS in the distant forest; an OWL HOOTS nearby. FRANCIS PREYHAUSEN is seated at a desk in his study, visible through a window on the second floor of the mansion.

MAP & CAPTION: "AUSTERLITZ, MORAVIA... 1726 A.D."

INT. STUDY - NIGHT

FRANCIS (about 40 years old) puts a QUILL PEN into an INK POT and reads a MANUSCRIPT by the light of a CANDELABRA. A large DOG is asleep on the floor beneath an open window. A copy of MAGNALIA NATURAE lays on the desk beside a small GOLD BOX that is filled with softly glowing lumps of the RED PHILOSOPHERS STONE.

FRANCIS (V.O.)

Wenzel Seyler found the legendary Philosophers Stone, and with it he made gold for Emperor Leopold Habsburg. He was ennobled as a baron, and appointed Master of the Mint. (beat) And somehow, the man survived his enemies and himself. (beat) This, I swear is a true account of those events.

Beautiful wife SOPHIA enters, dressed in a nightgown.

SOPHIA

Francis, darling, it is so very late! Do come to bed now.

FRANCIS

Sophia, my love, I shall come at any moment now!

SOPHIA

Now, Francis! (beat) You used that excuse an hour ago.

She smiles amorously and withdraws, leaving the door ajar. Francis sighs, picks up the candelabra, and exits, closing the door behind him.

CLOSE UP : GOLD BOX filled with pieces of RED PHILOSOPHERS STONE that glow in the moonlight.

EXT. - MEADOW & FOREST - FULL MOON - NIGHT

MAP & CAPTION: "BRNO, MORAVIA, 1350 A.D."

A WOLF HOWLS in the distance; an OWL HOOTS in a nearby tree
 FREDERICK GUALDUS and KARL STEINER, wearing brown robes and
 cloaks, are twisting a dew-soaked LINEN SHEET between them.
 The dew drips into a GLASS BOWL. Another wet sheet hangs
 between two trees. A DONKEY stands nearby, loaded with TWO
 BASKETS, one filled with CORKED BOTTLES, the other with
 twisted SHEETS. Karl yawns and shivers, almost losing his
 grip.

FREDERICK

Be careful, Karl! If it touches the
 earth, the spirit will be lost!

KARL

I feel as if I am dreaming,
 Frederick, walking in my sleep!

FREDERICK

The astral power of the moon is
 affecting you! Fight it!

KARL

Tell me again why we are doing
 this? Perhaps I will be inspired to
 waken.

FREDERICK

The earth exhales mercurial vapors
 of gur at night, and we collect it
 then on clean linen, and contain it
 in glass, and hide it from the sun.
 (beat) And when we unite it with
 the solar sulfur, and lunar water,
 and seed it with a little gold, we
 may obtain the blessed
 Philosophers' Stone, the Tincture
 of Gold, God willing.

KARL

Oh. (beat) Amen. Now I am awake.

FREDERICK

Good! For we must hurry. Dawn
 approaches, and gur cannot endure
 sunlight!

SERIES OF SHOTS:

INT. HUT - DAY/NIGHT

(A) FREDERICK is seated on a stool, observing a sealed FLASK
 that sits atop a small brick FURNACE. He falls asleep and
 slips into a DREAM.

(B) DREAM: ANIMATED ALCHEMY IMAGES with MUSIC; The contents of the flask pass through every color of the RAINBOW, then become WHITE, and finally ruby RED GLASS.

(C) KARL watches FREDERICK drop a grain of the RED GLASS into a CRUCIBLE full of molten LEAD, stirring it with a NAIL. A sudden METALLIC CRACKLE and FLASH OF BLUE LIGHT startles them. The crucible is full of GOLD, with the nail stuck in it.

(D) FREDERICK places the MANUSCRIPT in small COPPER BOX with several GLASS BOTTLES; KARL shuts the lid.

(E) FREDERICK leaves, leading the donkey as KARL watches.

(F) EXT. MEADOW - DAY

Several Augustine FRIARS in brown robes are building a small CHAPEL, and an ABBEY is under construction several hundred feet away. Their HUTS can be seen in the background. KARL kneels beside a HOLE in the floor and buries the COPPER BOX. Two friars push the PEDESTAL of a pillar over the hole; the other sections are laying around. A matching pillar has been completed.

EXT. ROYAL SOCIETY OF LONDON (RSL) - DAY (ESTABLISHING)

CAPTION: "ROYAL SOCIETY OF LONDON FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF NATURAL KNOWLEDGE... 1680 A.D."

INT. RSL LIBRARY - DAY (ESTABLISHING)

DR JOHAN BECHER stands at the head of a long TABLE, addressing the gentlemen seated before him: ISAAC NEWTON (age 39), chemists ROBERT HOOKE (40) and ROBERT BOYLE (55), astronomer EDMUND HALLEY (26), and diarist SAMUEL PEPYS (40)(pronounced "peeps"), who is taking notes. A TELESCOPE stands beside a window in the background.

CAPTION: "DR JOHAN BECHER... SIR ISAAC NEWTON... SIR ROBERT BOYLE... ROBERT HOOKE... EDMUND HALLEY... SAMUEL PEPYS"

DR BECHER

Gentlemen, I am honored to be here today , and it pleases me to present you with my new booklet, Magnalia Naturae, which Sir Robert Boyle did urge me to publish.

(beat) Today, I shall give you a more detailed and personal account of it.

(beat) We have all heard of the alchemists' Philosophers' Stone, the fabled tincture that transmutes base metals into noble gold. Yet, we must ask if it might really exist. Now our doubt is resolved by two friars of the Augustine order, Wenzel Seyler and Francis Preyhausen. (beat) And the truth of it is affirmed by men of great quality, even by the Holy Roman Emperor Leopold Habsburg! (beat) I too was a witness on many occasions.

Becher picks up a GLASS of wine and takes a sip.

EXT. OLD CHAPEL & ABBEY - DAY (ESTABLISHING)

CAPTION: "ST. THOMAS' ABBEY... 1675 A.D."

The OLD CHAPEL is in ruins; the thriving ABBEY now is walled and gated. The CITY GATE of BRNO is visible about one-half mile away.

INT. ABBEY CHAPEL - DAY (ESTABLISHING)

FRANCIS PREYHAUSEN (age 30) is serving Mass with another FRIAR. He stands to the left of the ALTAR, holding a TRAY with PITCHERS of wine and water. FRIARS and PRIESTS kneel in the pews.

DR BECHER (V.O.)

It is thanks to Friar Preyhausen that we know so much about this matter. (beat) And his honesty is most admirable, for he did not steal the treasure, when he could have done so very easily.

PRIEST #1

Dominus vobiscum

FRANCIS

Et cum spiritu tuo.

PRIEST #1

Oremus.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

WENZEL SEYLER is carousing with the gorgeous DAUGHTER when the furious GOVERNOR COLLEBRAT bursts in, beating him with a cane as he tries to grab his clothes and escape.

DR BECHER (V.O.)
 Wenzel Seyler was born in Vienna,
 about the year 1650. Twenty-five
 years later, he was caught in
 flagrant delecti with the daughter
 of Count Collebrat, who was
 Governor of that precinct.

GOVERNOR COLLEBRAT
 I will castrate you, you bastard!
 (beat) Guards! Guards!

WENZEL
 Ow! Agh! Ow! Stop!

DAUGHTER
 Papa! Papa! No! Papa! No!

GOVERNOR COLLEBRAT
 Silence, whore! You just became a
 nun! (beat) Guards! Guards!

TWO GUARDS rush in and corner Wenzel.

DR BECHER (V.O.)
 Fear of prison was the beginning of
 wisdom for Wenzel Seyler.

SERIES OF SHOTS: EXT. ABBEY GATE - DAY

WENZEL stands flanked by TWO GUARDS while a PRIEST knocks at
 the gate; Wenzel and the priest enter, and the gate slams
 shut. The guards walk away.

DR BECHER (V.O.)
 And with the help of a priest,
 suddenly he found religion, and
 entered the Augustine abbey at
 Bruna, in Moravia.

INT. WENZEL'S CELL - DAY

Forlorn WENZEL stands in his cramped cell. His hair has been
 cut short, and he is dressed in a BROWN ROBE and SANDALS. The
 cell is crowded with a COT, TABLE, STOOL, TRUNK, CHAMBER POT,
 and a BUCKET of water. He flops on the cot with a groan and
 pulls the BLANKET over him.

EXT. ABBEY GARDEN - DAY (ESTABLISHING)

WENZEL and FRANCIS are weeding a row of vegetables.

WENZEL

How did you come to be here,
brother Francis?

FRANCIS

My family has financial troubles.
(beat) And I have no income, so I
am a burden to them. (beat) I came
here a year ago, but already I am
bored near to death.

He gestures towards several other FRIARS nearby.

FRANCIS

We are in limbo with a pompous lot
of self-righteous pretenders. They
vow to be celibate, but most of
them masturbate each night, or
sodomize each other.

WENZEL

Indeed. But you at least are
innocent. This place seems like
purgatory to me, yet it is heavenly
compared to the hell of a dungeon.
(beat) But it is possible to
escape, if one has money.

EXT. FIELD - DAY (ESTABLISHING)

WENZEL and several other FRIARS are tossing rocks into a
WHEELBARROW near the OLD CHAPEL ruins.

DR BECHER (V.O.)

After a year of probation, Wenzel
Seyler took the monastic vows.
Still, he planned to escape, though
he had no means. So when he heard
the legend of a treasure, hidden in
the abbey, he tried to find it.

FRIAR #1

Even if the story is true, and you
find some gold, the Prior will
spend it to glorify the Church, but
you will be as poor as ever.

LATER

EXT. OLD CHAPEL - DAY

WENZEL is dowsing with a willow BRANCH around the chapel
ruins.

DR BECHER (V.O.)
 The friar had no scruples about
 using magic to help himself, and
 fortune truly favored him thus.

EXT. ROADSIDE, BRNO CITY GATE - DAY (ESTABLISHING)

Old KATHERINE is selling milk, cream, and cheese from a small
 CART.

DR BECHER (V.O.)
 The friars were allowed out of the
 abbey on Saturdays, and thus Wenzel
 met an old woman who practiced
 witchcraft.

KATHERINE
 Fresh milk, cream, cheese!

WENZEL approaches her and they converse inaudibly. Katherine
 hands him CUP of milk.

EXT./INT. COTTAGE - DAY (ESTABLISHING)

WENZEL is sitting at a table. KATHERINE hands him a CUP.

WENZEL
 What is this, Katherine?

KATHERINE
 This potion will strengthen your
 magical powers, my dear. Drink,
 drink!

He sniffs the brew, then quaffs it with a grimace.

WENZEL
 Aggh!

KATHERINE
 Yes, yes! Good!

MINUTES LATER

WENZEL yawns and slouches as the potion takes effect.

WENZEL
 (slurring)
 What wash in that drink?

KATHERINE
 Laudanum.

WENZEL

Law what?

KATHERINE

Laudanum. Milk of poppies in wine.
And mandrake root.

SERIES OF SHOTS:

WENZEL passes out, and KATHERINE helps him slide to the floor; she opens a small BOX and removes a WAX BALL, covered with SYMBOLS. It has a hole in it, and a plug. She lifts his robe and milks him into a CUP, cackling happily during the process. Wenzel moans in pleasure between snores. Katherine fills the hole with his sperm and plugs the ball. She licks it and her fingers, and sips the potion.

DR BECHER (V.O.)

She gave him a ball of wax, covered with magical figures, and told him it would roll to the place where treasure was hidden. (beat) I have seen and tested it, and it is a wonderment indeed.

KATHERINE

Wenzel, my dear, if there is a treasure hidden at the abbey, this magic ball can find it!

She removes her GOLD WEDDING RING.

KATHERINE

Behold, my gold wedding ring!

WENZEL

(groggily)
I am beholding!

She places the ball and the ring several feet apart on the floor. The ball wobbles, then rolls to the ring. Katherine picks them up, and presents him with the ball.

KATHERINE

I shall give my magic ball unto you, Wenzel dear, but you must promise to give me some portion of the treasure, if you find it.

WENZEL

I promise to do that, Katherine.
Thank you!

KATHERINE

It is my pleasure, dear boy!

She cackles with delight as Wenzel examines the ball and sniffs it with a puzzled look.

WENZEL

I must go now, lest I be late returning to the abbey.

INT. PRIOR'S OFFICE - DAY (ESTABLISHING)

WENZEL stands before the PRIOR and FATHER ALBERT.

PRIOR

Friar Seyler, it is our custom to have young friars assist the elder fathers. I have decided that you shall attend to father Albert.

WENZEL

Yes, prior, thank you.

FATHER ALBERT

Come to my cloister after evening mass and we shall discuss your duties.

WENZEL

Yes, father Albert.

WEEKS LATER

INT. CLOISTER - NIGHT

FATHER ALBERT is seated by the fireplace, sipping a cup of wine. WENZEL adds wood to the fire.

WENZEL

Father Albert, I have heard other friars speak of a treasure hidden in our abbey. (beat) Do you know the story?

FATHER ALBERT

Yes, I do. Prior Karl Steiner who established our abbey is said to have been a master of alchemy, and he paid for the construction with gold that he made. Supposedly he buried a treasure in the old chapel.

WENZEL

In the chapel, eh? (beat) Father Albert, I have seen your books, so I know you study magic and alchemy. I also know an old woman who practices witchcraft in secret, and I have got from her a wax ball with supernatural power to discover hidden treasure. I saw it work with her gold wedding ring! Perhaps we could find the treasure with it!

FATHER ALBERT

That is unlikely. Still, I am curious and willing to test the thing.

INT. OLD CHAPEL - DAY

FATHER ALBERT watches WENZEL place the WAX BALL on the floor. It quivers and rolls slowly towards the PILLAR hiding the copper box.

FATHER ALBERT

That is very interesting indeed! (beat) Yet, though a treasure may be hidden there, I doubt if our prior will allow us to dig it up.

WENZEL

Alas!

EXT. OLD CHAPEL - STORMY NIGHT

BOLTS OF LIGHTNING strike and ignite the roof timbers.

DR BECHER (V.O.)

But God and nature had other plans, for soon thereafter, a great storm arose, and lightning struck the old chapel, and set it aflame.

EXT. OLD CHAPEL - DAY (ESTABLISHING)

Several PRIESTS and FRIARS stand around the smoldering ruins. The PRIOR addresses FATHER ALBERT.

PRIOR

Father Albert, I have decided to dismantle this ruin. We can use the stones elsewhere. (beat) I want you to supervise the work.

FATHER ALBERT
I shall be happy to do so, prior.

EXT./INT. OLD CHAPEL - DAY

The chapel has been reduced to piles of stone; only part of the floor and base of the pillar remain. WENZEL and FATHER ALBERT watch closely as THREE FRIARS pry the base loose and push it aside.

FATHER ALBERT
Enough for now! I am quite hungry,
and surely you are too.

FRIARS
(chorus)
Yes, father Albert!

FATHER ALBERT
Go to the kitchen, and tell friar
Mendel I sent you. I shall join you
shortly.

The friars amble away, talking inaudibly amongst themselves.

MINUTES LATER

One FRIAR turns to look back just as WENZEL pulls the tarnished COPPER BOX from its hole.

INT. CLOISTER - DAY

WENZEL stands watching eagerly as FATHER ALBERT, seated at his table, opens the COPPER BOX to reveal FOUR BOTTLES and the MANUSCRIPT. He opens a bottle and taps out a chunk of RED PHILOSOPHERS' STONE. Wenzel is clearly disappointed.

WENZEL
There is no gold here! This is no
treasure! The legend was a lie!

FATHER ALBERT
I don't think prior Steiner left
this as a jest, Wenzel.(beat) If
there is some virtue in this glass,
then perhaps this manuscript may
tell us the secret. I must make a
study of it.

Albert begins to pore over the manuscript. Wenzel sighs, and tends to the fire.

DAYS LATER

INT. CLOISTER - DAY

FATHER ALBERT is seated at his table, studying the MANUSCRIPT. WENZEL knocks and enters.

FATHER ALBERT

Wenzel, go to the kitchen and find an old pewter dish, and an iron pan. (beat) But do not let anyone see you do it. I want to make a secret examination of this glass.

WENZEL

Yes, father Albert.

LATER

A small iron pan sits on a bed of coals in the fireplace, filled with molten pewter. FATHER ALBERT uses a knife to scrape off a chip of the red glass.

FATHER ALBERT

Now we shall see if I have understood this manuscript truly, and found the use of this glass. Prior Karl Steiner, who established this abbey, was known to practice the great art of alchemy. (beat) Drop this into the pewter, and stir it.

WENZEL drops the chip into the melt and stirs it with an iron NAIL. The sudden LOUD METALLIC CRACKLE and FLASH OF GOLD LIGHT startle them. They are astonished to see that the pewter has become gold, with the nail stuck in it.

WENZEL

(hysterically)
Hee hee hee! Ha ha ha!

LATER

FATHER ALBERT hands a small piece of cut gold to WENZEL, who takes it eagerly.

FATHER ALBERT

When you go into Brno tomorrow, take this to the goldsmith on Zeitstrasse. Tell him that you have melted down some Roman coins that you inherited, and wish to sell the gold." (beat) You may keep the money. But tell no one of this!

WENZEL

Yes, father Albert! Thank you!

FATHER ALBERT

Wenzel!

WENZEL

Yes, father Albert!

FATHER ALBERT

Tell no one! No one!

WENZEL

Yes, father Albert. No one. Thank you!

FATHER ALBERT

Thank God, Wenzel.

WENZEL

Thank you, dear God!

INT. GOLDSMITH'S SHOP - DAY (ESTABLISHING)

GOLDSMITH #1 has weighed the gold.

GOLDSMITH #1

I will pay you twenty ducats.

WENZEL

I, I will accept that!

INT. WENZEL'S CELL - DAY

WENZEL sits at his table, looking happily at his pile of DUCATS while he dines on meat and wine.

INT. ALBERT'S CLOISTER - NIGHT

WENZEL is seated on a stool by the fireplace, staring into the flames. FATHER ALBERT is seated at the table studying the MANUSCRIPT by candlelight.

WENZEL

Father Albert, I have been thinking about the treasure.

FATHER ALBERT

I am sure you have, my son. And what have you thought?

WENZEL

I think that since I helped to discover it with my wax ball, half of it should belong to me.

FATHER ALBERT

Oh, no, Wenzel, not yet! We know not how to manage this thing (beat) Besides which, you have no need of money here! And if you were enriched by this tincture, it would prejudice your immortal soul, and you might become a most miserable man. (long beat) I will, however, secretly allow you two crowns every week for your diversions. But for now, I must study the manuscript more closely. This glass is the Philosopher's Stone, and it has many other powers and virtues.

WENZEL

What might such powers be, father?

Albert reads slowly from the manuscript.

FATHER ALBERT

The author says, our blessed stone hath virtue to conquer all disease, and it bestows a long life in good health upon the happy possessor. For the power to change base metals to gold is but one of its wonderful powers!

He pauses to look intently at Wenzel.

FATHER ALBERT

Wenzel, we must be very careful, if we would live to enjoy this treasure with peace of mind. Otherwise, the envy of greedy men may well get us killed.

WENZEL

Oh. (beat) Amen.

FATHER ALBERT

Amen.

LATER

FATHER ALBERT locks the COPPER BOX in his desk, and pockets the key as WENZEL watches. Then they exit together.

DR BECHER (V.O.)

Friar Seyler worried that the old priest might tell the prior, for he hoped get the copper box and escape from the abbey, but Father Albert kept it locked away, and never left his room except to attend Mass and take his meals. (beat) Then one day fate intervened.

EXT./INT. CLOISTER - DAY

WENZEL enters to finds FATHER ALBERT sprawled on his bed, struck dumb and blind by a stroke.

WENZEL

I will get help, father Albert!

SERIES OF SHOTS:

WENZEL starts for the door, then stops and searches Albert's pockets for the key. He retrieves the COPPER BOX, wraps it in a BLANKET, hurries to his cell, puts the box in his trunk, and returns to Father Albert's cloister. Then at last, he calls for help.

WENZEL

Help! Help! Father Albert needs help!

MINUTES LATER

Several PRIESTS and FRIARS stand in the corridor, watching and praying as Father Albert dies.

INT. RSL LIBRARY - DAY

DR BECHER takes a sip of wine.

DR BECHER

And thus Wenzel Seyler came to possess the Philosophers' Stone. (beat) Now, it so happened soon after, that the abbey held a solemn debate about alchemy, and for some strange reason, friar Seyler was chosen to argue that metals can be transmuted, although he knew nothing at all about the subject.

He sips his wine again.

INT. WENZEL'S CELL - DAY

WENZEL swigs wine from a BOTTLE, then slowly reads aloud from Albert's notes, slurring his words.

WENZEL

The alchemisht can change the elements... from one to another, such as mercury to gold... first by purifying them, and then by the rotation... ummm... of fire into air... ummm... and of air into water, and ummm... water to earth. (beat) And thush the base elements can be transmuted to noble shilver or gold... by alchemy... Hmmm... That sounds good.

INT. ABBEY HALL - DAY (ESTABLISHING)

Dozens of FRIARS and PRIESTS are gathered for the debate. WENZEL stands at a podium, reading from his notes; the opponent FRIAR smirks from another podium. The MODERATOR priest is not amused.

WENZEL

And thus the alchemist can change the elements from one to another, such as mercury to gold... uh-h-h... first, by purifying them, uh-h-h, then by rotation of fire into air... uh-h-h... and of air into water, and uh-h-h... of water into earth... and, ummm... thus the base elements can be transmuted to noble gold.

The audience begins to snicker, and Wenzel loses his temper.

WENZEL

Why do you laugh? I can prove it to be true!

MODERATOR

Hold thy tongue, fool! I can sooner turn thee into a cow, than thou could transmute the metals!

Wenzel is chagrined, but remains silent as the audience laughs.

EXT. ABBEY GARDEN - DAY

FRANCIS and WENZEL are walking together. Other FRIARS whisper aside and chuckle in the background.

FRANCIS

Today you claimed you are able to transmute metals. (beat) That was very foolish of you, even if it is true. (beat) Besides that, friar Thomas told me he saw you find a box in the old church. (beat) I also heard a rumor, that a friar sold some gold to a goldsmith in Brno. (beat) Now, you may claim that your new money was sent by your family, yet people believe it was you who sold the gold. (beat) Wenzel, I pray you to declare the truth of this matter to me!

Wenzel falls to his knees and clutches Francis' robe.

WENZEL

Brother Francis, I beseech thee, swear to me, you will not tell anyone the secret I shall reveal to you! (beat) Swear it to me! Give me your help, and when we flee from here, we shall have great wealth, and advance to high dignities together! But you must give me your most solemn oath of faith and secrecy!

FRANCIS

I swear upon my very soul, brother Wenzel, I will keep your secret, if you will share it with me! We will hazard this together! (beat) Now stop pulling on my robe and get up before someone sees you like this!

Wenzel stands and hugs Francis.

WENZEL

By all that is sacred, I do swear my fealty with you, brother Francis!

FRANCIS

And I swear the same with you, Wenzel!

INT. WENZEL'S CELL - DAY

WENZEL shows FRANCIS the WAX BALL, COPPER BOX, BOTTLES, and MANUSCRIPT, and a lump of GOLD.

WENZEL

And thus we found it! (beat) And this is the gold we made with but a tiny bit of the red glass!

FRANCIS

I would not have believed you, but this gold is very convincing.

WENZEL

If I am under suspicion, then I dare not sell any more of this gold myself. Perhaps you should sell it for us, Francis, but not dressed as a friar!

SERIES OF SHOTS:

(A) INT. GOLDSMITH'S SHOP - DAY

FRANCIS, dressed in plain clothes, watches the GOLDSMITH #1 count out 100 DUCATS.

(B) EXT. STREET - DAY

WENZEL is talking to a pretty PROSTITUTE standing in a doorway; she giggles and they slip inside.

(C) EXT. ABBEY GATE - DAY

WENZEL enters the abbey gate with the PROSTITUTE disguised as a man, with a wig, hat and cane.

INT. WENZEL'S CELL - DAY

WENZEL and the PROSTITUTE are intercouring too loudly.

PROSTITUTE

Oh! Ohh! Ohhh!

WENZEL

Shhh! Quiet!

INT. ABBEY CORRIDOR - DAY

Two FRIARS are listening at Wenzel's door. They look at each other aghast, then scurry away.

MINUTES LATER

The PRIOR bangs on Wenzel's door as two PRIESTS and several FRIARS watch.

PRIOR
Friar Seyler! Open the door!

INT. WENZEL'S CELL - DAY

WENZEL is climaxing with the PROSTITUTE.

WENZEL
I am coming!

He scrambles into his robe and unlocks the door. The enraged prior barges in. The naked prostitute cowers as the men gawk.

PRIOR
Mother of God! A jewess!

PRIEST #1
What are we to do? If we give her to the magistrate, the public noise of it will shame us with infamy!

PRIOR
We shall keep her here until late tonight, then cast her out at the garden gate. No one will see her then. (beat) And you, friar Seyler, will remain here in your cell, and tomorrow you shall be whipped!

He turns to the prostitute.

PRIOR
Dress yourself, harlot! You will do the penance of a whipping tonight!

He turns to a PRIEST.

PRIOR
Bring her to my cloister.

INT. ABBEY CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Two FRIARS are eavesdropping at the prior's door; they scurry away when a PRIEST approaches and stops to listen in.

INT. PRIOR'S CLOISTER - NIGHT

The naked PROSTITUTE is kneeling before the PRIOR, who is sprawled on a chair with his robe raised.

PRIOR

Lord, forgive this whore for the
sin she is about commit.

She giggles, takes a deep breath, and gobbles him.

EXT. ABBEY GARDEN DOOR - NIGHT

The PROSTITUTE giggles as she exits; unseen FRIARS laugh happily as they shut the door.

SERIES OF SHOTS:

(A) EXT. WENZEL'S CELL - NIGHT

FRANCIS taps on the door, then slips a NOTE underneath, and a long length of TWINE.

(B) EXT. ABBEY GROUNDS - NIGHT

WENZEL tosses down one end of the TWINE. Francis ties it to a ROPE, Wenzel hauls it up, then lowers the COPPER BOX, and Francis hurries away with it.

(C) INT. FRANCIS' CELL - NIGHT

FRANCIS is writing a LETTER at his tiny desk. The COPPER BOX sits open on his cot, with the MANUSCRIPT and BOTTLES beside it.

DR BECHER (V.O.)

Now, friar Francis was a friend of the chief steward to prince Charles of Lichtenstein, who was a keen student of alchemy. (beat) So he wrote a letter appealing for help, and sent a bit of the tincture to be tested.

INT. LABORATORY - DAY

PRINCE CHARLES is startled by the LOUD METALLIC CRACKLE and FLASH OF GOLD LIGHT, then grins with delight at the sight of gold.

INT. SALON - DAY

PRINCE CHARLES hands a packet to his chief steward KURT.

DR BECHER (V.O.)

Prince Charles then gave secret assistance to the two friars, and he entrusted the steward with his royal seal for the purpose.

INT. ABBEY KITCHEN - DAY

FRIAR MENDEL hands a TRAY with BREAD, WATER, and a KEY to FRANCIS as they speak inaudibly.

INT. WENZEL'S CELL - DAY

FRANCIS enters, places the tray on the table, and pulls some roast chicken from his pocket. Starving Wenzel grabs the meat and wolfs it down.

FRANCIS
Wenzel, I have a plan.

Wenzel burps; Francis sighs, pulls a lump of WAX from his pocket and makes an impression of the key.

DAYS LATER

INT. ABBEY CORRIDOR - NIGHT

FRANCIS unlocks the door with his own KEY; WENZEL emerges, and they hurry away.

FRANCIS
Here is some of the tincture, as you asked. (beat) And for the time being, I have buried the box again.

WENZEL
Thank you, Francis.

EXT. ABBEY GARDEN DOOR - NIGHT

The steward KURT is waiting with HORSES as they exit. He hands a sealed LETTER to Francis.

KURT
You must get away from here as soon as you can, Francis, and go to Felisburgh. This letter will give you an audience with prince Charles.

FRANCIS
I thank you, Kurt, and prince Charles as well! (beat) Godspeed!

EXT./INT PRINCE CHARLES' MANSION - NIGHT

KURT and WENZEL arrive and enter.

INT. ATTIC - NIGHT

WENZEL enters a tiny attic room with a LAMP and a BASKET of food and drink. KURT shuts the door and locks the hasp with a PADLOCK, then drips WAX onto it from the CANDLE DISH he carries, impresses it with prince Charles' SEAL.

INT. ABBEY CORRIDOR - DAY

FRIAR MENDEL rushes out of Wenzel's cell.

FRIAR MENDEL
Help! Help! Friar Seyler has
escaped!

INT. GOVERNOR'S OFFICE - DAY (ESTABLISHING)

The PRIOR and MAGISTRATE stand before the enraged GOVERNOR COLLEBRAT.

GOVERNOR COLLEBRAT
Close the city gates, and search
every house!

MAGISTRATE
Search every house? Are you
serious?

GOVERNOR COLLEBRAT
Do I look happy? (beat) Start with
the nobles! (beat) I swear, I will
castrate that god damned bastard
son of a bitch!

He gulps a GLASS of wine, then smashes it against the wall. The magistrate and prior make a quick exit.

EXT. PRINCE CHARLES' MANSION - DAY

The MAGISTRATE and several SOLDIERS knock at the door.

MINUTES LATER

EXT./INT. MANSION DOORWAY - DAY

KURT confronts them angrily.

KURT
This is the house of Prince
Charles! You cannot enter here
without his express permission!

MAGISTRATE

The law says otherwise, the governor commands it, and even the prince must obey it! (beat) Or shall I arrest you for resisting my authority?

KURT

I am so foolish as that, but I must protest, and shall report your intrusion to the prince!

MAGISTRATE

Please do. Now stand aside!

They enter and start searching. Kurt follows the magistrate.

INT. ATTIC - DAY

KURT and the MAGISTRATE stand in the cramped attic. The SOLDIERS wait below.

KURT

This is the private closet of prince Charles, which he sealed as you can see. You cannot break it open without incurring his most royal displeasure! Nor do I have the key!

The magistrate jiggles the padlock and considers for a moment.

MAGISTRATE

I am satisfied here.

He shouts down to the soldiers waiting below.

MAGISTRATE

Let us move on to the next house.

EXT./INT. MANSION DOORWAY

Kurt sighs with relief as he closes the door when the magistrate and soldiers leave.

DAYS LATER

EXT. CITY GATE - DAWN

A bell tolls, and the city gates open slowly. (long beat) Prince Charles' carriage suddenly comes around a corner and races out the gate into the morning fog as the surprised guards watch.

DAYS LATER

SERIES OF SHOTS:

(A) EXT. ABBEY GATE - DAY

FRANCIS exits the abbey gate with several FRIARS.

(B) EXT. BRNO CITY GATE - DAY

FRANCIS pauses as the other friars enter the city gate. They don't notice, and he turns away.

(C) EXT. STABLE - DAY (ESTABLISHING)

FRANCIS trots away on a horse as a happy MAN jingles a handful of COINS.

(D) EXT. COTTAGE - DAY

FRANCIS rides away as KATHERINE stands in the doorway, cackling over the chunk of GOLD she holds.

INT. PRINCE CHARLES' STATEROOM - NIGHT

PRINCE CHARLES, WENZEL, and FRANCIS are seated together before the fireplace, sipping wine and conversing.

PRINCE CHARLES

Unfortunately, my friends, I cannot hide you here any longer, since Governor Collebrat continues to search for you. If his spies find you, he will obtain a mandate from the supreme consistory at Vienna, and that will be the end of you. (beat) I strongly advise that you go to Rome with your tincture, to prove yourself to the Pope himself, and obtain a discharge from your monastic vows. I shall provide you with a letter of introduction, and a thousand ducats for your expenses. (beat) My chamberlain Pietro is Italian and he shall accompany you, to serve as your agent.

WENZEL

I thank your highness. You are most considerate and kind. We are grateful for your patronage and the protection you have afforded us.

PRINCE CHARLES

Thing nothing of it. It is simply
the right thing to do.

EXT. ESTATE GROUNDS - DAY (ESTABLISHING)

WENZEL and FRANCIS stroll casually, followed at a discrete
distance by a watchful SERVANT.

FRANCIS

I think it would be wise of you to
take only a little of the tincture
with you to Rome.

WENZEL

I agree. I do not trust the prince.

FRANCIS

I shall leave discretely later this
day to seek an abode in Vienna.
(beat) I shall attend Mass each
morning at Saint Stephan's
cathedral, so you can meet me there
when you return.

WENZEL

Good, good.

They continue walking, speaking inaudibly.

EXT. ESTATE GROUNDS/GATE - DAY

PIETRO and WENZEL lead a packhorse in tow as they trot away.

SERIES OF SHOTS:

EXT. ROAD - DAY

They ride for hours through scenic landscapes.

EXT. ROAD - LATE AFTERNOON

PIETRO comes to a halt.

PIETRO

Whoa! Whoa! (beat) I must dump a
shyte!

He dismounts, and Wenzel follows suit.

WENZEL

I need to pass water! (beat) And I
think we should soon find shelter
for the night.

PIETRO

There is an inn at the next town,
about one league further.

As Wenzel starts to pee, Pietro pulls a pistol on him. Wenzel raises his hands and pisses himself.

PIETRO

Give me your gold-making glass and
your ducats, or I will kill you!

WENZEL

Please, signor Pietro, I beg you,
do not shoot! The money is in my
saddlebag! I call God to witness,
sir, I have only a little of the
tincture with me, as a gift for the
Pope! Look! See?

Wenzel carefully pulls a small bottle from his pocket and hands it over.

MINUTES LATER

WENZEL stands naked, hands above his head, with his clothes and baggage strewn about.

PIETRO

Damn it all! (beat) This is not
worth the bother of killing you!
Besides that, you are a monk, so
the Church might not forgive me.
(beat) Well then, we shall come to
terms, or else I shall kill you
anyway!

He aims the pistol; Wenzel raises his hands higher, and nods eagerly.

WENZEL

Yes sir! Yes sir! I agree
completely!

Pietro waves the pistol about as he talks.

PIETRO

Shut up! (beat) I shall tell prince
Charles that you escaped with the
treasure. And I shall keep these
ducats and this piece of magic
glass.

WENZEL

That is very fair and generous of
you, sir!

He shuts up as Pietro aims at him again.

MINUTES LATER

PIETRO laughs as he gallops away with the HORSES, then turns to shoot offhand before riding out of sight around a bend. Moments later a COACH rattles past; the WOMEN inside giggle and two GUARDS following on horseback guffaw; Wenzel starts to get dressed.

INT. PRINCE CHARLES' STATEROOM - DAY

PRINCE CHARLES is livid with rage; he slaps PIETRO again and again.

PRINCE CHARLES

You idiot! You lost the greatest treasure on earth, and a thousand of ducats too!

PIETRO

Forgive me, highness! He fought like a madman and ran away into the forest!

PRINCE CHARLES

Silence, fool! Begone, before I lose my temper, and kill you!

The prince throws a wineglass as Pietro beats a hasty bowing retreat out the door.

EXT. ST. STEPHAN'S CATHEDRAL, VIENNA - DAY (ESTABLISHING)

The BELL TOLLS for Mass as FRANCIS enters.

INT. ST. STEPHAN'S CATHEDRAL - DAY

FRANCIS is appalled to see bedraggled WENZEL appear beside him.

WENZEL

Francis!

FRANCIS

Yaah! Good God, Wenzel! What happened to you?

WENZEL

Pietro robbed me on the road to Rome!

Several PEOPLE turn to frown at them.

FRANCIS

Shhh! Shhh! Not so loudly! Let us leave, quickly now! Good God!

WENZEL

Right now, God is food! I am starving!

INT./EXT. ST. STEPHAN'S CATHEDRAL - DAY

They hurry outside and away.

EXT. STREET MARKET - DAY

WENZEL grabs a roast CHICKEN from a VENDOR'S STALL and holds it up to heaven.

WENZEL

Thank you, Jesus! (beat) I swear, I will never go hungry again!

He proceeds to devour the food, then grabs a handy BOTTLE of wine and guzzles it as FRANCIS pays the shocked VENDOR.

MINUTES LATER

They are sitting on the grass in a park. Wenzel burps and flops back.

FRANCIS

We must be much more careful if we would stay alive to enjoy wealth and freedom.

WENZEL

Alas! What can we do? Only the Emperor or the Pope can save us now! (beat) Perhaps we should flee to England, or America!

FRANCIS

I hope we need not go so far as that barbaric place! (beat) I also know Count Hans DePaar, who practices alchemy, and he is a favorite of the emperor. I shall try to arrange a meeting with him.

WENZEL

Very well, but in the meanwhile I plan to leave Europe.

INT. FRANCIS' APARTMENT - DAY (ESTABLISHING)

FRANCIS is seated at a table, writing a LETTER. WENZEL is sprawled asleep on a bed, snoring. Francis pots the quill pen, blows on the paper, and reads it aloud.

FRANCIS

My dear Count DePaar, greetings.
(beat) I am writing to you
concerning the subject of alchemy,
so dear to you.

INT. LABORATORY - DAY (ESTABLISHING)

WENZEL, FRANCIS, and COUNT HANS DEPAAR are standing around a small furnace. DEPAAR, about 50 years old, is afflicted with gout and uses a cane. He carefully stirs the molten metal in a CRUCIBLE with an iron NAIL until a LOUD METALLIC CRACKLE and FLASH OF GOLD LIGHT surprises them. DePaar laughs happily at the sight of the gold with the nail sticking out.

HANS DEPAAR

Friar Seyler, you have transmuted
me into a believer! (beat)
Tomorrow, I shall make an appeal to
emperor Leopold on your behalf!
(beat) In the meanwhile, I welcome
you to abide here!

WENZEL

I, we are most grateful to you,
Count DePaar!

EXT. HOFBURG PALACE (OLD SECTION) - DAY (ESTABLISHING)

CAPTION: "HOFBURG PALACE, VIENNA"

INT. IMPERIAL CHAMBER, HOFBURG PALACE - DAY (ESTABLISHING)

HANS DEPAAR leans on a cane as he pleads his case before EMPEROR LEOPOLD HABSBURG, who is 35 years old, short and ugly, with bad teeth. He is seated at a large table covered with documents, surrounded by MINISTERS; DR BECHER, COUNT AUSTIN, and FATHER SPIESS are among them. PORTRAITS of the HABSBURGS adorn the walls (Leopold, Ferdinand, and Rudolf).

EMPEROR LEOPOLD

I can give no great heed to your
proposition, Count DePaar,
especially since I have report that
your friar is a fugitive, and he
leads a dissolute life. (beat)
Moreover, he is reported to
practice magic!

HANS DEPAAR

There is great weight in the objections made by your imperial majesty. (beat) And though I would not presume to impose upon you, it does seem reasonable to me to consider this thing apart from the person it concerns. For all men are sinners, are we not? Yet must we therefore reject their inventions and the good works they do? (beat) As for me, I have no reason to love alchemy, for I have suffered much loss by it. I never made genuine gold, save with the tincture of friar Seyler. Therefore I appeal to your majesty to deputize witnesses to make a trial of it.

Leopold gives DePaar a long look as he considers his words.

EMPEROR LEOPOLD

My dear Count, although you mean well, perhaps you are deceived. We all know that modern chymistry has shown ancient alchemy to be fallacious, untrustworthy. (beat) But I also know full well how my father the emperor Ferdinand tested alchemy, and highly prized what was shown to him by Baron Kaos, and rewarded him for it. (beat) For that reason, I can believe there may be some truth in alchemy. (long beat) Doctor Becher!

DR BECHER

Yes, your majesty?

EMPEROR LEOPOLD

It is one of your favorite duties as my Minister of Commerce, to test the claims of alchemists, to prevent frauds upon society. (beat) All of them have failed to prove true, have they not?

DR BECHER

Yes, your majesty, that is so. I have yet to prove a single recipe that claims to make gold or silver. Not one has passed every test.

EMPEROR LEOPOLD
 Doctor Becher, I order you to make
 a trial of these claims, with
 witnesses skillful in chymistry.

DR BECHER
 Yes, your majesty.

EMPEROR LEOPOLD
 And my confessor father Spiess
 shall represent the clergy.

FATHER SPIESS
 Yes, your majesty.

HANS DEPAAR
 Your majesty is most gracious, and
 I am so very grateful! With your
 permission, I shall attend to your
 command this instant!

Leopold nods with a benign smile, and dismisses DePaar with a
 wave of his hand. Becher and Father Spiess leave with him,
 bowing out the door; Leopold ignores them as he speaks
 inaudibly to a minister.

INT. HANS DEPAAR'S SALON - DAY (ESTABLISHING)

Dr BECHER and Father SPIESS are seated in armchairs when
 Count DEPAAR enters with WENZEL.

HANS DEPAAR
 Father Spiess, doctor Becher, this
 friar Wenzel Seyler.

WENZEL
 It is an honor to meet you, father
 Spiess, and you, doctor Becher.

Father Spiess nods politely, but he is clearly unimpressed.

DR BECHER
 Greetings, friar Seyler! I am eager
 to test your tincture!

WENZEL
 I am prepared to prove the matter
 at any time, doctor Becher.

HANS DEPAAR
 Then let us proceed to my
 laboratory, and do this thing!

INT. DEPAAR'S LABORATORY - DAY (ESTABLISHING)

The group stands around a small metal FURNACE.

HANS DEPAAR

As you see, doctor Becher, I own one of your famous portable furnaces! (beat) And here are several ounces of the best German tin, and new Hessian crucibles. Please examine them, to be sure there is no gold hidden inside.

DR BECHER selects a CRUCIBLE, smashes it with a HAMMER, then proceeds to peer at the pieces.

DR BECHER

Since the year of our lord 1667, when I was commissioned by the emperor to examine the claims made by alchemists, I have never found any to be true. (beat) Still, I continue to hope that the Philosophers' Stone might actually exist.

He chooses another CRUCIBLE, scratches its interior with a KNIFE, then fills it with pieces of tin, and sets it in the hole atop of the furnace.

DR BECHER

More than once have I seen crucibles made with a false bottom of wax and a little gold. (beat) I am satisfied with these. I shall however keep the rest of the crucibles and the tin for further examination.

HANS DEPAAR

Yes, of course, doctor Becher! And now, at last, you shall see the truth of alchemy!

He opens a VIAL and empties a chip of the RED STONE onto a DISH for Doctor Becher to examine.

FATHER SPIESS

I do not believe in alchemy, but I will observe carefully and testify truthfully to emperor Leopold.

(beat) Nevertheless, I fear of magical enchantment, and would bless these matters in God's name before we continue.

WENZEL

Oh, yes, please do, father Spiess! It can only help!

FATHER SPIESS

In nomine patris, et filius, et spiritui sancto.

His voice trails off into a Latin mumble as Dr Becher pumps the BELLOWS.

MINUTES LATER

The LOUD METALLIC CRACKLE and FLASH OF GOLD LIGHT startles everyone. Dr Becher and Father Spiess are amazed to see solid gold in the crucible. DePaar is quite pleased, and Wenzel is visibly relieved.

DAYS LATER

INT. IMPERIAL CHAMBERS - DAY

COUNT DEPAAR, FATHER SPIESS, DR BECHER and WENZEL stand before Emperor LEOPOLD.

EMPEROR LEOPOLD

I am eager to hear the particulars of your examination, doctor Becher. What do you have to say about the matter?

DR BECHER

Your imperial majesty, I have prepared a written account, and all of us have subscribed to it.

He holds forth a sealed ENVELOPE; a MINISTER steps forward to take it.

DR BECHER

I examined the tin and crucibles, and the tincture that was used. I also tested the gold that was produced. (beat) It is the purest I have ever seen. I have calculated that one part of the tincture will transmute ten thousand parts of tin to gold.

(beat) We also have repeated the experiment in the royal mint, and made most exact assays of every substance we employed. (beat) Your majesty, it does appear that friar Wenzel Seyler indeed possesses a true tincture, the philosophers' stone.

EMPEROR LEOPOLD

How very interesting! (beat) And what is your opinion of this matter, father Spiess?

FATHER SPIESS

Your majesty, I know nothing of ancient alchemy, nor of modern chymistry, yet it did indeed appear to be a small miracle of rare device.

The Emperor pauses to consider before speaking.

EMPEROR LEOPOLD

Doctor Becher, I thank you for your expertise in the determination of this matter.

Dr Becher beams with happiness as he bows.

EMPEROR LEOPOLD

As for you, friar Seyler. (long beat) You will assume the Augustine habit again, and amend your manners, so as to satisfy the clergy.

Wenzel smiles and bows awkwardly.

WENZEL

I shall, I shall, your majesty.

EMPEROR LEOPOLD

And, I enjoin thee, count DePaar, to treat friar Seyler kindly, and assure him of my favor. (beat) I shall investigate this matter further, to make a final decision for its disposition. (beat) So be it.

HANS DEPAAR

I humbly thank your imperial
majesty. (beat) I shall discharge
this commission as you command.

Leopold gives them a benign smile, and dismisses them with a
nod and a wave.

INT. DEPAAR'S OFFICE - DAY

COUNT DEPAAR hands TWO LETTERS to FATHER DUNELL. WENZEL
stands beside him, dressed in his brown Augustine robe.

DR BECHER (V.O.)

That very same day, count DePaar
arranged for his confessor father
Dunell to vest friar Seyler with
his Augustine robes once again, and
he wrote letters to the prior and
the governor to inform them of the
emperor's command.

INT. PRIOR'S OFFICE - DAY (ESTABLISHING)

The enraged PRIOR crumples the LETTER and throws it on the
floor, then grabs a CUP of wine from his ALTAR and gulps it
down, and smashes the cup as FATHER DUNELL watches aghast.

PRIOR

God damn that friar! (beat) What
are you looking at? Go to hell!

FATHER DUNELL

I pray thee, God forbid!

Father Dunell kisses his ROSARY and crosses himself with it
as he exits.

INT. GOVERNOR'S OFFICE - DAY

GOVERNOR COLLEBRAT furiously crumples the LETTER, throws it
on the floor, grabs and gulps a GLASS of wine, then dashes it
against the wall. FATHER DUNELL edges toward the door.

GOVERNOR COLLEBRAT

God damn that friar! (beat) And
your Count DePaar too! (beat) And
you can go to hell as well!

FATHER DUNELL

May God beg to differ.

Father Dunell crosses himself as he withdraws.

SERIES OF SHOTS:

EXT./INT. ST. STEPHAN'S CATHEDRAL, VIENNA - DAY

THREE MEN follow WENZEL into the cathedral. He mixes into a small group of MONKS, and as they walk past a CONFESSIONAL, he slips into the priest's compartment; a WOMAN enters to confess; the spies pass by; Wenzel sneaks out of the booth; the baffled woman emerges; Wenzel presses a ducat into the hands of a smiling PRIEST, who shuts the back door as Wenzel exits.

DR BECHER (V.O.)

Now, Count DePaar hoped to persuade friar Seyler to call for Francis Preyhausen to bring him all of the tincture, thinking he was safe from violence under the emperor's protection. (beat) But Wenzel perceived the real intention, so he made a pretext to attend holy Mass, and he managed to elude the count's spies.

INT. FRANCIS' APARTMENT - DAY

WENZEL and FRANCIS are seated at a table with the COPPER BOX and BOTTLES. Wenzel selects one.

WENZEL

We have endured many hazards together, and now we have the emperor's promise of protection. Even so, we must always beware. (beat) Only we know how much tincture we really possess. Therefore, I will take one bottle and say it is all. And we shall bury the rest again.

FRANCIS

I agree. (beat) And, I shall remain in hiding here until we can act with confidence.

WENZEL

I must go now. Take care, brother Francis.

Wenzel rises to leave.

INT. DEPAAR'S SALON - NIGHT

WENZEL rises from an armchair by the fireplace as DePaar enters, limping on his cane.

WENZEL

Good evening, count DePaar!

HANS DEPAAR

Good evening, Wenzel. (beat) What a long and tiring audience I had with the emperor today!

DePaar pulls a letter from one pocket coat, and a pistol from the other, and puts them on the table. He groans and holds his hip.

WENZEL

Is something amiss, dear count?

HANS DEPAAR

My damned gout has worsened. (beat) But besides that, something is very wrong indeed. (beat) Emperor Leopold has given me this secret decree. (beat) He demands the tincture of thee, Wenzel, and if you refuse to deliver it, I must execute the sentence of death upon thee.

WENZEL

I cannot believe the emperor would do such a thing!

Wenzel stands up and reaches for the letter. DePaar picks up the pistol and takes aim. Wenzel raises his hands.

HANS DEPAAR

Leopold does what he must. This is his secret decree, and it may not be opened, or I shall have to kill you! Sit down!

Wenzel sinks back into the chair.

HANS DEPAAR

Wenzel, you are not alone! I am your friend! I offer you my fatherly love! (beat) I have been thinking about this all day, and I have a good idea, a plan.

WENZEL

I, I welcome your advice,
excellency.

HANS DEPAAR

If you will heed my advice, perhaps
we can free ourselves from this
dilemma. (beat) Surely, both of us
need the emperor's protection. And
just as surely, he shall force us
to give him the tincture. Yet I
dare to say, he is not truly worthy
of such a divine treasure, and
would only waste it fighting wars
against the Turks, and the French.

WENZEL

Yes?

HANS DEPAAR

Even so, we can keep the tincture,
if we pretend to try to multiply it
in quantity and potency, as the
master alchemists claim to do.
(beat) And then, after some time
has passed, we shall say that the
glass broke in the heat of the
furnace, and we lost all but a
little.

WENZEL

That is very possible.

HANS DEPAAR

But you must engage yourself to me
in greater faith. (beat) Give me
half the tincture, and we shall
make a mutual oath to be faithful,
one to another, for as long as we
live! What has passed between us
here tonight shall remain our
secret.

WENZEL

That seems very fair to me, Count
DePaar. (beat) Even so, I would
have us sign a written agreement,
and confirm the oath with our
promise and signature, with a copy
for each of us.

HANS DEPAAR

I agree completely, Wenzel! Let us
do so!

DePaar clutches his hip and grimaces as he sinks into a chair. Wenzel watches with alarm.

HANS DEPAAR
Ohhh! Lord, have mercy!

INT. RSL LIBRARY - DAY

DR BECHER sets down his wineglass.

DR BECHER
Now, a few days later, count DePaar suffered a most severe attack of gout. And to relieve the pain, he drank some potable gold, but poorly prepared by the alchemist Burrhy, and it only caused him much more grief.

INT. BEDROOM -- DAY

HANS DEPAAR is on his deathbed. His brother PETER DEPAAR stands on one side, FATHER DUNELL on the other. A small DESK stands nearby.

DR BECHER (V.O.)
His condition worsened, and he saw his death at hand. (beat) So he called for his brother Peter, his only heir, for Hans was a bachelor.

HANS DEPAAR
Peter, listen carefully, and heed my words.

PETER DEPAAR
Yes, Hans.

HANS DEPAAR
You have spent as much time and money as I in the vain pursuit of alchemy. But now I have won the prize!
Several years ago in Rome, a soothsayer told me, that I would obtain the philosophers' stone, but he said that soon afterward, I would die! (long beat) And now I have it, and my death as well. (beat) I have nothing more valuable to give you, Hans, than the portion I have obtained. (beat) It is locked in that desk.

I shall entrust it to father Dunell, and he shall deliver it to you upon my death.

FATHER DUNELL

I shall take the desk with me to Saint Francis monastery tonight, dear Hans.

HANS DEPAAR

Good, good. (beat) And now I must ask you to perform the last sacrament for me.

PETER DEPAAR

Brother Hans, it is doubtful that your end is nigh, so I shall leave for now, and return tomorrow. Meanwhile, take a little laudanum so you can sleep well.

Peter leaves the room as Father Dunell ministers to Hans.

HOURS LATER

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

FATHER DUNELL leaves the estate in a COACH.

EXT./INT. ST. FRANCIS MONASTERY - NIGHT (ESTABLISHING)

FATHER DUNELL and the COACH DRIVER are watching TWO MONKS carry the DESK indoors, when BISHOP CASTILLE arrives in a magnificent COACH, followed by his entourage of PRIESTS.

COACH DRIVER

Who is that, father?

FATHER DUNELL

That must be Bishop Castille from Spain. We have been expecting him. He has come to visit our emperor.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

HANS DEPAAR expires with a groan. The MAID who is sitting vigil rushes out.

SERIES OF SHOTS:

EXT. ROAD/PETER DEPARR'S MANSION - NIGHT

A MESSENGER gallops away from the estate and along a country road to PETER DEPAAR'S MANSION, dismounts, and bangs the door knocker; Count PETER DEPAAR exits and climbs into a waiting coach, the DRIVER whips the horses and they rattle away, followed by TWO MEN on horseback. The messenger trots off alone.

EXT. ST. FRANCIS MONASTERY - NIGHT

PETER DEPAAR arrives and bangs at the gate. The DRIVER remains aboard the coach.

PETER DEPAAR
Open up! Open up, I say!

The peephole slides open and a MONK peers out.

MONK
Who are you? What do you want at this hour?

PETER DEPAAR
I am Count DePaar! I must speak with father Dunell, immediately! It is urgent, an emergency!

The monk opens the gate and DePaar barges in with his men.

MONK
Your excellency, everyone has retired for the night! I beg you return tomorrow morning.

DePaar slips a coin into his hand.

PETER DEPAAR
I must see him right now! Take me to him!

The flustered monk stares at the coin in his hand.

MONK
But, but I, I...

DePaar presses another coin to the monks' hand.

PETER DEPAAR
Now, man, now!

MONK
Yes, excellency. Please follow me.
(beat) But quietly, I beg you!

He leads the way, carrying a lamp.

INT. MONASTERY CORRIDOR - NIGHT

HANS DEPAAR pounds on Father Dunell's door.

MONK
Be quiet, please!

DePaar ignores him.

PETER DEPAAR
Father Dunell! Father Dunell!

FATHER DUNELL yawns and squints as he opens the door.

FATHER DUNELL
Ehhh? What? (beat) Count DePaar?

PETER DEPAAR
Father Dunell, Hans has died, and I
have come for the desk he left to
me.

FATHER DUNELL
Count DePaar, I am shocked by your
rudeness! Please wait until
morning! Then I will deliver the
desk to you in the presence of our
abbot.

PETER DEPAAR
I cannot wait till then. I will
have it now, thank you! (beat)
Stand aside, please!

He pushes the priest aside and his men enter to retrieve the desk, damaging its legs in the process.

MONK
Stop! Stop! (beat) Help! Help!

Several MONKS emerge from their cells. Then BISHOP CASTILLE appears, accompanied by two PRIESTS, and confronts the Count.

BISHOP CASTILLE
Who are you? Why are you here at
this ungodly hour?

PETER DEPAAR
I am Count Peter DePaar, the
postmaster of Austria.

(beat) My brother Hans left a desk for me with father Dunell, and I will have it now.

FATHER DUNELL

Excellency, I am father Dunell. I was the confessor of Count Hans DePaar, who died a few hours ago. (beat) He entrusted me to deliver this desk to his brother here. I ask only that he wait until morning to receive it, with the abbot as a witness.

BISHOP CASTILLE

No, father. (beat) I shall present it to the emperor when I see him today. (beat) And you, sir Deeper.

PETER DEPAAR

DePaar, Count Peter DePaar.

BISHOP CASTILLE

Count Deeper, you can claim your damned desk from Emperor Leopold! Now begone!

SERIES OF SHOTS:

PETER DEPAAR and his TWO MEN leave, escorted by MONKS. BISHOP CASTILLE gestures to a PRIEST to bring the DESK, and walks away. The priest gestures to two MONKS to carry the desk after him; FATHER DUNELL yawns and shuts his door.

INT. IMPERIAL CHAMBERS - DAY

BISHOP CASTILLE stands before EMPEROR LEOPOLD on his throne. TWO PRIESTS behind the bishop hold the wobbly DESK.

EMPEROR LEOPOLD

My dear Bishop Castille, I welcome back to Vienna!

BISHOP CASTILLE

I thank your imperial majesty for this warm welcome. (beat) And I bring you greetings and salutations on behalf of the church and empress Margaret of Spain.

EMPEROR LEOPOLD

I hope your journey was safe and pleasant.

BISHOP CASTILLE

Yes, it was, your majesty, until I arrived at Saint Francis' monastery last night. Then your postmaster, Count Deeper --

EMPEROR LEOPOLD

(interrupting)

Count Deeper? Do you mean DePaar?

BISHOP CASTILLE

Yes, him. He came to the monastery to take this desk from our father Dunell, and woke everyone with his violence! I have confiscated it, and told him to come beg it from you.

EMPEROR LEOPOLD

And so he shall! Such rudeness is completely intolerable, especially in a holy monastery!

BISHOP CASTILLE

I am thankful to your imperial majesty. (beat) But we have other matters of great import to discuss.

EMPEROR LEOPOLD

Indeed, we do. Let us withdraw to my privy chambers.

Everyone bows as Leopold rises, and the two men chat inaudibly as they exit.

INT. IMPERIAL CHAMBERS - DAY

WENZEL is speaking inaudibly as stands before the seated EMPEROR LEOPOLD and BISHOP CASTILLE. FATHER DUNELL and DR BECHER, and COUNT AUSTIN are in attendance with several other COURTIERS.

DR BECHER (V.O.)

The story raced through the court and the city, and soon it came to Wenzel Seyler. (beat) And he obtained an audience with the emperor, and told him the whole story, how Count Hans DePaar had extorted the tincture from him, and forced him to vow secrecy, and he proved it with his copy of their oath.

WENZEL

Your majesty, I am very glad that the tincture has come into your hands, for I have been determined to deliver it to you, but the violence of prince Charles and Count DePaar prevented me. (beat) I implore you to grant me your protection, and return the tincture to me, that I may test its virtues and powers.

EMPEROR LEOPOLD

Now that I understand the events in this affair, I will extend my protection to you, friar Seyler, and I shall entertain you in my court. (beat) Therefore, I commit you to the care of good Count Austin of Wallenstein, the governor of Hattshirr.

COUNT AUSTIN bows in acknowledgement.

COUNT AUSTIN

As you command, your majesty.

EMPEROR LEOPOLD

And the tincture shall be returned to you, that you may examine and enjoy it. (beat) But I shall keep a portion of it for vouchsafe.

WENZEL

Your majesty, I am eternally grateful for your mercy and understanding.

EMPEROR LEOPOLD

Good. Amen. (beat) Make the necessary arrangements with my secretary.

He nods with a benign smile, and dismisses Wenzel with a wave toward the secretary. They withdraw to another room as Leopold and the Bishop converse inaudibly.

DR BECHER (V.O.)

Friars Seyler was well received into the emperor's good graces, and Francis Preyhausen too, and they were assigned comfortable lodgings at the Imperial Bowling Green.

INT. LABORATORY - DAY

WENZEL, FRANCIS, DR BECHER, COUNT AUSTIN, COUNT LAMBERG, and several COURTIERS watch as EMPEROR LEOPOLD himself drops a bit of the tincture into a CRUCIBLE of molten metal and stirs it cautiously. Everyone is startled by the ensuing LOUD METALLIC CRACKLE and FLASH OF GOLD LIGHT, and amazed to see the gold.

DR BECHER (V.O., CONT'D.)

He also made gold from lead before the emperor, which I witnessed, and Count Austin made a chain of it in memory of the occasion.

INT. IMPERIAL CHAMBERS - DAY

FRANCIS PREYHAUSEN, dressed in his Augustine habit, stands before EMPEROR LEOPOLD, who is speaking inaudibly to FATHER SPIESS.

DR BECHER (V.O., CONT'D.)

And the emperor sent friar Preyhausen to Rome to seek a dispensation from the Pope, to release them from their monastic vows.

INT. LABORATORY - DAY

WENZEL (in his Augustine robe) is sitting at a table, talking inaudibly and drinking wine with PAUL DELOURDES and HERMAN LECHLER. Several alchemical BOOKS lay open on the table, and some CRUCIBLES.

DR BECHER (V.O., CONT'D.)

Now, friar Seyler met many chymists and alchemists, yet none knew the true practice, so he only wasted his powder. Then some charlatans insinuated themselves upon him, errant knaves who taught him cunning frauds.

Delourdes points to the bottom of a crucible he is holding.

PAUL DELOURDES

My favorite artifice is to mix some powdered gold in the bottom of a crucible and cover it with clay. When I pretend to make gold from lead, I poke through the clay with an iron rod and stir up the gold.

Delourdes breaks the crucible to show the trick.

HERMAN LECHLER

Ha ha! Yes, it works every time,
because the customers are blind
with greed! (beat) I paid for my
first tour of Europe that way.

They laugh and drink up.

EXT. CARINTHIAN FORT - DAY (ESTABLISHING)

MAP & CAPTION: "CARINTHIAN FORT, AUSTRIA"

DR BECHER and COUNT AUSTIN arrive in a COACH.

INT. LABORATORY - DAY

WENZEL, DELOURDES, and LECHLER are distilling something smoky and smelly when COUNT AUSTIN enters with Dr BECHER. They put kerchiefs to their noses.

DR BECHER (V.O.)

The foul stench soon became a
bother at the court, and Wenzel was
always watched by Count Austin. So
Wenzel told the emperor that the
noxious fumes were dangerous, and
had a laboratory built for him in
the Carinthian Fort, and he had the
entire place to himself. (beat) And
emperor Leopold commanded me to
assist him, so I got to know the
man much better.

WENZEL

Doctor Becher! Count Austin!
Welcome!

Count Austin frowns, shakes his head and exits quickly. Dr Becher remains.

INT. RSL LIBRARY - DAY

DR BECHER sips his wine.

DR BECHER

Now, everyone knows the master
alchemists claim that their
transmuting stone can be increased
in potency and in quantity.
Therefore, many people asked to buy
a bit of it, hoping to augment
their portion to infinity.

And Wenzel Seyler was glad to sell it for much more than it was worth in the gold it could produce.

INT. SALON - DAY (ESTABLISHING)

WENZEL and COUNT SAVONIUS stand at a table on which sits a small box filled with gold DUCATS. Wenzel hands over a small VIAL.

WENZEL

I thank you, Count Savonius. And here is a generous portion of my tincture for you to test.

COUNT SAVONIUS

I thank you likewise, friar Seyler.

WENZEL

Do let me know if your experiment is successful.

The count tucks the vial in his pocket, and watches closely as Wenzel locks the box in a cabinet and pockets the key.

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

WENZEL is sitting between COUNT SAVONIUS and gorgeous ANGELIQUE, dining with several other GUESTS, including COUNT LAMBERT.

WENZEL

Angelique, my dear, you look quite delicious! I am considering to eat you for dessert, or perhaps save you for a midnight gobble!

ANGELIQUE

Oh, Wenzel, you silly darling!

She leans over to kiss him, but Wenzel suddenly gasps and clutches his stomach in agony as he falls to the floor. The guests look on aghast. Angelique kneels beside the groaning Wenzel, trying to comfort him.

ANGELIQUE

Oh, Wenzel, Wenzel, my darling!
Please don't die!

One guest vomits in his plate, others rush to the windows to regurgitate, and the rest run out of the room. Count Savonius remains seated and calm.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - EVENING

COUNT SAVONIUS hands a note up to his coach DRIVER.

COUNT SAVONIUS
Go to doctor Biliot on
Kirchstrasse, and bring him here at
once.

DRIVER
At once, excellency!

He whips the horses and drives away as other GUESTS exit and hasten to their carriages and coaches.

HOURS LATER

EXT. DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

COUNT SAVONIUS greets DR BILIOT as he steps out of the coach.

COUNT SAVONIUS
My good doctor Biliot! I am so
grateful to you for making this
call so late in the day!

DR BILIOT
I am always at your service, dear
count. How can I help you now?

The two speak inaudibly as they enter the building.

INT. FOYER - NIGHT

They enter the house.

COUNT SAVONIUS
And so, I am unharmed, thank god!
(beat) Yet I could have been
poisoned easily as the friar, for I
was sitting beside him!

The count pulls Dr Biliot aside into the empty salon.

COUNT SAVONIUS
I am, however, suffering from the
loss of a thousand ducats that the
friar took from me for some of his
tincture. (beat) I want it back,
and the tincture too. (beat) The
money is in the cabinet in his
study, and the key is in his
pocket.

If you can find the tincture for me, the ducats are yours to keep.

DR BILIOT
I understand, excellency.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

DR BILIOT is examining WENZEL, who moans occasionally.
ANGELIQUE stands close by.

DR BILIOT
It appears that he has been poisoned with arsenic. I have administered vitriol, and a bezoar. Now we must wait. (beat) Tomorrow I shall administer leeches, or perhaps bleed him a little.

ANGELIQUE
Oh, Wenzel, I would suck the poison out of you if I could!

Dr Biliot rolls his eyes.

DR BILIOT
The leeches suck very well, but you are welcome to assist them, fraulein. (beat) There is nothing you can do here. You should go home and get some rest.

ANGELIQUE
Oh, no, doctor! I am his fiancee, I will stay by his side.

DR BILIOT
I fear you will only exhaust him the more. Do not worry, my dear, I shall remain here to attend him closely.

He guides her out the door, then starts to search the room.

INT RSL LIBRARY - DAY

DR BECHER holds his glass of wine as he speaks.

DR BECHER
The unscrupulous doctor found the thousand ducats easily, but the tincture was too well hidden.

INT. BEDROOM -- DAY

WENZEL is seated up in bed; ANGELIQUE is fussing over him.

DR BECHER (V.O.)

Soon after, to everyone's surprise,
the man began to recover his
health.

INT. SALON - DAY

WENZEL smiles broadly as he reads the papal LETTER inaudibly;
FRANCIS sits quietly, looking pensive.

DR BECHER (V.O., CONT'D.)

And a few weeks later, Francis
Preyhausen returned from Rome with
the papal dispensation.

WENZEL

Cheer up, Francis! Our prayers have
been answered! Our dream has come
true! We are free from the Church,
and we have wealth, honor, fame,
and women!

FRANCIS

I am happy enough, Wenzel, but I am
very worried about the many adoring
strangers you have attracted. I
would prefer to remain incognito.
You alone should know where I
reside.

WENZEL

That probably is wise of you. We
may well enjoy the emperor's
protection, but lesser men will
always seek to steal our treasure.

FRANCIS

Soon I shall go traveling again,
for I want to study alchemy in the
great libraries. (beat) We know
almost nothing of the proper use of
the tincture, and apparently no one
here in Vienna knows any more than
we do. Perhaps I can find an adept
who will teach me the true
practice. (beat) I shall send
letters to keep you informed of my
progress.

WENZEL

Do as you wish, Francis. I shall provide you with all the money you need. Perhaps you should also take a bit of the tincture with you.

FRANCIS

Mmmm, yes, thank you, Wenzel.

They sip their wine.

INT. RSL LIBRARY - DAY

DR BECHER sips his wine.

DR BECHER

Wenzel Seyler was visited by persons of the highest rank, and was mightily respected by the most eminent ladies, countesses, and princesses. (beat) And soon after recovering from the poison, he married a very crafty woman named Angelique, who had attended to his sickness and his desires. But in Vienna she was considered to be a common whore.

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

WENZEL and ANGELIQUE are hosting a banquet. FRANCIS and DR BECHER are among the GUESTS.

WENZEL

My friends, I fancy that the all the elements of heaven and earth conspire together to make me happy! Eat, drink! Be happy with me!

The guests laugh, Francis manages a wan smile; Dr Becher grins and sips his wine.

DR BECHER

As a spectator to the scene, I thought he was living in a fool's paradise. (beat) It reminded me of Cornelius Agrippa's book, The Vanity of Sciences, where he wrote that, if he were master of the philosophers' stone, he would spend it all in whoring, for he could easily make women yield to his lust.

(beat) And Wenzel Seyler did just that, squandering his wealth in debauchery.

MONTAGE: INT. MANSION - NIGHT

WENZEL and ANGELIQUE are hosting a wild party.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY/NIGHT

They carouse in a choreography of orgiastic combinations with a series of women and men, with frenetic MUSIC.

INT. MANSION - NIGHT

WENZEL and ANGELIQUE host another wild PARTY.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY/NIGHT

And another ORGY.

INT. MANSION - NIGHT

And another wild PARTY.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY/NIGHT

Another ORGY climaxes in a chorus of passionate moans and MUSIC.

LATER

ANGELIQUE and WENZEL lay beside each other, breathing fitfully. They are pale, covered with syphilis chancres. Angelique expires.

DR BECHER

Wenzel and Angelique were so depraved, they soon contracted the French disease. Angelique died of it, yet Wenzel made another miraculous recovery.

LATER

Wenzel weeps as he kneels beside Angelique. A priest stands praying at the other side of the bed.

DR BECHER

I sincerely believe the tincture saved him, because he handled it so often, and it strengthened his blood.

But he knew nothing of its medicinal virtue, so he did not use it to treat Angelique, and so she died.

INT. SALON - DAY

WENZEL chooses from a selection of fabrics as TAILORS fawn over him and DECORATORS fuss with draperies.

DR BECHER (V.O.)

And after her death, he proceeded to exceed all bounds of modesty, and indulged in every sinful excess. In three years time he spent more than ten thousand crowns in all manner of luxury.

MONTAGE : INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

WENZEL presides over a BANQUET with a dozen GUESTS.

LATER

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

WENZEL is carousing in bed with two WOMEN from the banquet.

LATER

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

WENZEL presides over another drunken BANQUET.

LATER

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

WENZEL is at the center of another ORGY.

INT. SALON - MORNING

WENZEL sits exhausted at a table set with a HOOKAH, lumps of HASHISH, a glass and BOTTLE of wine, and a CUP of coffee. Francis enters.

WENZEL

Good morning, Francis.

FRANCIS

Greetings, Wenzel. (long beat) We need to talk.

WENZEL

Ohhh, you sound very serious.
(beat) Can it wait? My head is
ringing like a church bell.

FRANCIS

It tolls for thee, Wenzel. (beat)
Truly, brother, I fear for your
very soul. Your depravity is
scandalous! It is a disgusting
disgrace!

WENZEL

Yes, my friend, it is indeed. I
should be ashamed, yet my lust
seems to know no bounds! And no
woman resists me, not even wives,
or virgins, or nuns!

FRANCIS

Nuns? (beat) Wenzel, your penis is
your Achilles heel! Sex killed
Angelique, and it nearly killed
you! (beat) Aren't you ever
satisfied?

WENZEL

No, I am merely satiated for a
little while at best. (beat) No
matter how often I confess my sins
and do penance, I cannot resist the
next temptation. I don't even
bother to resist, since I can buy
indulgences from priests and be
forgiven. (beat) But I have not
been sleeping well of late, and I
have a headache every morning.

FRANCIS

That can be cured easily, if you
would drink less wine.

WENZEL

Yes, of course! Why didn't I think
of that?

FRANCIS

Probably because you are drunk.
(beat) Seriously now, Wenzel! This
cannot endure! You are wasting the
tincture, and you know not how to
replace it! What will you do when
it is all spent? Will you become a
friar again?

WENZEL

Possibly, but not Augustine, nor
Jesuit. Benedictine, perhaps. They
make such excellent brandy!

Wenzel breaks off a piece of hashish, and fills the hookah.
Francis picks up the lump.

FRANCIS

What is this, pray tell?

WENZEL

It is called hashish. It helps me
to relax and sleep.

FRANCIS

Hashish? Whenever did you stop
relaxing?

WENZEL

Last month. I found that Turkish
coffee makes me very nervous. But
their hashish is most relaxing and
pleasant! It is true happiness! You
really should try it!

FRANCIS

Some other time, perhaps.

Wenzel pulls a bottle of tincture from his pocket.

WENZEL

I have spent most of the tincture
in this bottle. I need to retrieve
another from the box. I plan to go
to there tomorrow. Will you come
with me?

FRANCIS

Wenzel, there is only one bottle
left. (beat) And it is not there.

Wenzel jumps to his feet.

WENZEL

What? What do you mean, it's not
there?

FRANCIS

I removed it.

WENZEL

(excitedly)
You did what? Where?

FRANCIS

Calm yourself, Wenzel. It is quite safe. But you are not. (beat) Your depravity threatens to take your life, even as it killed Angelique. (beat) So long as you enjoy the protection of emperor Leopold, your enemies dare not attack. (beat) But they need not bother, for you are destroying yourself for them. (beat) You possess a great gift of god that could be used to help the needy, but you waste it in debauchery. What folly!

Wenzel stands and approaches Francis.

WENZEL

I don't want a sermon, Francis. I want my tincture. Where is it?

FRANCIS

It is close by, and I will return it when you come to your senses.

WENZEL

I have all my senses! That is how I enjoy myself!

FRANCIS

Nonsense! You are making ridiculous excuses for your. (long beat) Do you remember the vow we made when we began this adventure?

WENZEL

Yes, of course.

FRANCIS

I want you to renew that vow with me. Then I shall return the tincture to you. (beat) Think about it. Let me know when you are ready.

Francis rises and leaves abruptly while Wenzel stares after him.

INT. LABORATORY - DAY

WENZEL has weighed the remainder of his TINCTURE. He finishes writing on a parchment, puts the quill in the ink pot, and studies his notes with a worried look.

DR BECHER (V.O.)
He foresaw that his supply of
tincture would not last much
longer. And though he hoped to
increase it in quantity as the
masters teach in their books, he
was no real alchemist, so his
failed experiments only resulted in
further loss.

HOURS LATER

WENZEL is experimenting with DELOURDES and LECHLER.

DR BECHER (V.O., CONT'D.)
Yet his needs were such, and so
many people wanted to buy his
powder, that he resorted to a
fraudulent scheme with the
scoundrels DeLourdes and Lechler.
(beat) They adulterated the true
tincture with a mixture of cinnabar
and copper and litharge, all boiled
together in aqua fortis, so that
the ignorant might mistake it for
the real tincture, and buy it for
an exorbitant price. (beat) And by
means of this swindle, he got many
thousands of crowns.

INT. SALON - DAY

WENZEL hands a VIAL of false tincture to BARON KARNSTADT. A
POUCH full of GOLD COINS sits open on the table.

WENZEL
I thank you, Baron Karnstadt. I
hope your experiment is a success.

BARON KARNSTADT
I thank you likewise, Herr Seyler.
I shall make the experiment as soon
as I return to my laboratory.

INT. BARON KARNSTADT'S LABORATORY - DAY

BARON KARNSTADT angrily smashes a crucible filled with a lump
of grey metal.

INT. SALON - DAY

Livid BARON KARNSTADT confronts WENZEL.

BARON KARNSTADT

You have cheated me, Herr Seyler!
Return my money, or I shall bring a
complaint against you before the
court!

WENZEL

My dear baron, the verity of my
tincture has been proven by the
royal mint, as you know. I can only
suppose that you lack skill in the
art, and made a mistake in the
practice.

BARON KARNSTADT

Do not insult me, sir! I am well
skilled in the chymical science,
and I made no mistake! You sold me
a false tincture, and I can prove
it, for I did not use all of it!

WENZEL

Perhaps you should make another
trial of it. Maybe then you will
succeed.

BARON KARNSTADT

The only other trial I shall make
is of you in a court of law!

The baron storms out. Wenzel gulps a glass of wine, looking
very worried.

INT. RSL LIBRARY - DAY

DR BECHER sets down his wineglass.

DR BECHER

The matter could not be kept
secret, and people began to gossip.
Serious alchemists resented his
prostitution of their science and
his many crimes of fraud. But he
was in such good credit with the
emperor, that it was not safe to
impeach him. Nevertheless, several
of his victims took legal action,
and they managed to obtain a
judgment against him.

INT. ROYAL CHAMBER - DAY

EMPEROR LEOPOLD is consulting with several COUNCILLORS,
including DR BECHER.

DR BECHER (V.O.)

Now the emperor, unless he were to leave Wenzel Seyler to the judges, had to intervene, for so many complaints were made against him, and his infamy was so widespread, that Leopold thought it convenient to have the matter suppressed.

INT. RSL LIBRARY - EVENING

DR BECHER slurs slightly as he speaks. EDMUND HALLEY suppresses a yawn.

DR BECHER

Gentlemen, the hour is getting late, so I will bring this story to a close. (beat) In short, the emperor paid all of Seyler's debts, and made him surrender the remainder of his gold-making tincture, the true philosophers' stone.

INT. IMPERIAL CHAMBER - DAY

WENZEL kneels humbly and hands over a small BOTTLE to the pleased Emperor.

LATER

INT. IMPERIAL CHAMBER - DAY

WENZEL kneels before EMPEROR LEOPOLD. Several NOBLEMEN are present, and DR BECHER, and frowning FATHER SPIESS.

DR BECHER (V.O.)

And then the emperor advanced him to the title of Baron Seyler von Rheinburgh! (beat) And furthermore, he appointed Wenzel Seyler to the position of Hereditary Master of the Mint of Bohemia!

EMPEROR LEOPOLD

Arise, Baron Seyler von Rheinburgh, and go forth to your estate.

Wenzel stands, bows, and withdraws happily as the audience applauds politely. Emperor Leopold is visibly relieved to be rid of him.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT (ESTABLISHING)

WENZEL and his beautiful new wife WALDES are entertaining several aristocrats and nobles; FRANCIS and DR BECHER are among them.

DR BECHER (V.O.)

Emperor Leopold sent him away to Prague, where he now lives with his second wife. (beat) Her name is Waldes Kircheriana, a lovely woman of a noble family. (beat) And Baron Seyler made Francis Preyhausen the steward of his estate.

INT. RSL LIBRARY - EVENING

DR BECHER holds up a copy of MAGNALIA NATURA, and points to ROBERT BOYLE, who smiles.

DR BECHER

I published this story at the request of Sir Robert Boyle, to tell the truth of the matter, and to silence the critics of alchemy. (beat) Now, if I have mistaken any of the facts, well then, baron Seyler is still alive, and he is welcome to correct me with a more exact account. (beat) And to conclude, I sincerely wish that, if God bestows the philosophers' stone upon any alchemist, he uses for the benefit of humanity, and the glory of God, unlike Wenzel Seyler. (beat) One can only speculate how Emperor Leopold has used his portion. But his majesty did bestow me with a single grain of it, which I always keep at hand.

He produces a tiny VIAL from his pocket.

ISAAC NEWTON

May we take a look at it, doctor Becher?

DR BECHER

Certainly, Sir Newton!

DR BECHER hands the vial to NEWTON.

ISAAC NEWTON

Ah, what a wonderment! I would give anything to know the secret of it!

Newton sighs and hands the vial to ROBERT BOYLE.

ROBERT BOYLE

Gentlemen, I would like to mention a meeting I had recently with Count von Lamberg, who is the son of the Lord High Steward to Emperor Leopold. He was in the company of Count Austin, who came here as envoy to our King Charles. (beat) I asked him to tell me about baron Seyler, and was surprised to learn that he was very well acquainted with the man, and had witnessed several transmutations.

FLASHBACK:

SERIES OF SHOTS: EXT. IMPERIAL GARDEN - DAY

EMPEROR LEOPOLD, COUNT AUSTIN, COUNT LAMBERG are seated in armchairs; WENZEL kneeling before them with a small portable Becher FURNACE; he has cut a piece of silver from a PLATE and is handing it to Count Lamberg, who shows it to Emperor Leopold and Count Austin, then wraps it in a kerchief. Meanwhile, Wenzel dips a small BRUSH into a CUP that contains a dab of RED PASTE, paints it onto the cut in the plate, and sets it on the furnace; the silver turns to gold as they watch.

ROBERT BOYLE (V.O., CONT'D.)

The count recounted a particular demonstration he saw performed before the emperor, and showed me a wedge of silver cut from a plate, and some of the gold made from it, which he received as a souvenir. And later he presented both pieces to our good King Charles.

INT. RSL LIBRARY - EVENING

BOYLE offers the vial to EDMUND HALLEY, who is looking toward his telescope by the window.

ROBERT BOYLE

Mister Halley, sir?

EDMUND HALLEY

Oh, yes, thank you, Sir Boyle.

He peers into the vial for moment, then hands it to SAMUEL PEPYS, who is busy writing.

EDMUND HALLEY

Mister Pepys? Would like to take a look.

SAMUEL PEPYS

Yes, thank you, mister Halley.

ISAAC NEWTON

Oh, how I wish we might witness a demonstration of this tincture.

DR BECHER

Ahh, well, Sir Newton, you see the small quantity I possess. It is far more precious to me than the gold it can produce. (beat) Indeed, I fear even to open the vial, lest I lose the grain.

ISAAC NEWTON

I understand your concern, doctor. I too would be reluctant.(beat) Even so, we could be very careful, and use only the smallest speck.

DR BECHER

Ummm... Shall we talk about it later?

MINUTES LATER

Dr BECHER, Isaac NEWTON, and Robert BOYLE are chatting. Edmund HALLEY is showing his telescope to ROBERT HOOKE, SAMUEL PEPYS and others.

ISAAC NEWTON

I would have you know, doctor Becher, that you are being considered as a candidate for fellowship in the Royal Society. It shall come to a vote at the next meeting.

DR BECHER

I am very pleased to hear that, Sir Newton! (beat) It has always been my deep desire to join this august society!

ISAAC NEWTON

I promise you shall have my vote!

ROBERT BOYLE

And mine!

MONTHS LATER

INT. SALON - DAY (ESTABLISHING)

FRANCIS is reading a LETTER to WENZEL.

FRANCIS

Sir Robert Boyle in London has written to me. He says: (beat) I regret to inform you that doctor Becher passed away in London in October of 1682. (beat) Alas!

WENZEL

May his soul rest in peace. He was a good man, and a good friend!

FRANCIS

Yes, he certainly was, I shall have a Mass served for him.

Francis continues reading.

FRANCIS

He spoke often and highly of you. (beat) I have enclosed some copies of his Magnalia Naturae, which he published at my request.

Francis hands a copy of MAGNALIA NATURA to Wenzel.

FRANCIS finishes reading the LETTER to WENZEL.

FRANCIS

It always disappointed him, however, that he was not elected to membership in our Royal Society for the Improvement of Knowledge, here in London.

Francis sets down the letter. Wenzel lifts his glass in a toast.

WENZEL

In memoriam, doctor Johan Becher!

FRANCIS

Amen!

They click glasses and drink.

INT. FRANCIS' STUDY - DAY

FRANCIS is reading from Frederick's MANUSCRIPT.

FRANCIS (V.O.)

If you want to meet other adepts
who might be nearby, then dissolve
a grain of your philosophers' stone
in pure water and set it in a bowl
on the ground under a full moon.

SERIES OF SHOTS: EXT. GARDEN - FULL MOON - FULL MOON

FRANCIS stands before a BOWL full of RED WATER on the ground,
peering at it through a RED LENS.

SPECIAL EFFECT: A flickering BEAM OF REDDISH LIGHT rises
toward the FULL MOON.

FRANCIS (V.O.)

A strange beam of light will rise
from the bowl toward the moon. The
light is visible through a glass
that is painted with our tincture.

LATER

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

FRANCIS rubs the red water on his head, then snuffs the
bedside CANDLE; he glows softly in the dark.

FRANCIS (V.O.)

When you go to sleep that night,
rub some of the water on your head,
and pray to recognize your fellow.
You will dream of him, and you will
remember his name and place.

MINUTES LATER

FRANCIS is DREAMING: A mist clears to reveal the face of
FREDERICK GUALDUS.

FREDERICK (V.O.)

Frederick Gualdus. (beat) Prague.

EXT. GARDEN - NIGHT - FULL MOON

FREDERICK peers through a RED LENS at the BOWL of GLOWING RED
WATER on the ground. FRANCIS' FACE appears.

FRANCIS (V.O.)

Francis Preyhausen. (beat) Vienna.

EXT./INT. ST STEPHEN CATHEDRAL - DAY (ESTABLISHING)

FRANCIS is among dozens of people seated in the pews. FREDERICK, who appears to be about 50 years old, sits down beside him, smiling.

FREDERICK
(whispering)
Herr Preyhausen, I presume?

FRANCIS
You! (beat) I saw you in a dream!

FREDERICK
Shhh! Yes, at the full moon last month. (beat) I am Frederick Galdus. (beat) I knew Karl Steiner, the first prior of saint Thomas monastery. (beat) Together we prepared the Philosophers' Stone that you now enjoy.

Francis stares at him agape.

FRANCIS
That was four centuries ago!

FREDERICK
Sometimes it seems like only last year, but not today. (beat) I am more than eight hundreds years of age. (beat) The medicinal virtue of our blessed elixir will cure every disease, and will bestow long life with perfect health. Transmutation is but one of its many powers.

FRANCIS
That is what the manuscript says, that was in the copper box!

FREDERICK
Yes, I know, I wrote it.

People sitting nearby turn to look, frowning and shushing at them.

FREDERICK
Shall we go for a walk?

FRANCIS
Oh, yes indeed!

They stand and leave.

EXT. PARK - DAY

FREDERICK and FRANCIS stroll past a flock of SWANS in a pond.

FREDERICK

You must learn the proper use of the tincture, Francis, or you will be in peril of your soul, and cause great harm instead of good. (beat) As does Wenzel Seyler.

FRANCIS

He and I are the very best of friends, master Gualdus, yet I must agree with you. (beat) He is incorrigible. I pray for his soul every day, but nothing seems to change about him, except for the worse. He does not heed my advice. What else can I do?

FREDERICK

Probably nothing. He is his own punishment.

They continue walking in silence.

MINUTES LATER

FREDERICK

I have been watching you and herr Seyler for some time now. (beat) And so have the Jesuits.

FRANCIS

The Jesuits? Why?

FREDERICK

They want the philosophers' stone, of course, so they might easily rule the world by its powers. (beat) Their cruel Inquisition may have ended by papal decree, but the Jesuits have not changed their evil ways. They love only luciferian power, not god. (beat) Beware!

FRANCIS

But what can I do?

FREDERICK

You must learn to use the occult powers of our stone to protect yourself, and it.

(beat) As I said, I have been observing you for some time now, Francis, and I consider you to be worthy of initiation into some of the divine mysteries. Baron Seyler, however, has quite disqualified himself by virtue of his sins.
 (beat) Therefore, you must not tell him nor anyone else what I reveal to you.

FRANCIS

I promise you that, master Gualdus!
 I shall tell no one!

FREDERICK

Of course not. If you do, I shall abandon you to your fate. (beat)
 And stop calling me master. It is embarrassing, and dangerous.
 Frederick is sufficient.

FRANCIS

Yes sir. Thank you, master Gualdus,
 I mean, Frederick!

Frederick groans and rolls his eyes. They continue walking.

INT. WENZEL'S STUDY - DAY (ESTABLISHING)

WENZEL is seated at a desk, reading a document when FRANCIS knocks and enters abruptly.

FRANCIS

Wenzel! Wenzel! I met a real master alchemist! The one who made our tincture!

WENZEL

Soft, Francis! Whatever are you talking about?

FRANCIS

I followed the instructions in the manuscript, to contact others who might possess the tincture, and I met him! He is the master who made the philosophers' stone with Prior Steiner!

WENZEL

How can that be? Prior Steiner lived four centuries ago!

FRANCIS

He said the philosophers' stone confers long life, god willing and barring accidents. Even so, few masters have ever lived so long as him.

WENZEL

This should prove interesting! But I hope he does not want us to return the treasure. It is mine now, and apparently he can make all he needs.

INT. FRANCIS' LABORATORY - DAY

FREDERICK scrapes off a bit of the PHILOSOPHERS' STONE with a KNIFE and drops it into a BOTTLE of wine.

FREDERICK

Many alchemists who attained the philosophers' stone ingested it in hope of healthy longevity.

FLASHBACK:

INT. LABORATORY - DAY

An unidentified ALCHEMIST smiles as he scrapes a grain from the RED PHILOSOPHERS' STONE and swallows it with a glass of wine. Moments later, he clutches his stomach and collapses to the floor in agony.

FREDERICK (V.O., CONT'D)

But in their haste they met sudden death instead.

RETURN TO SCENE

FREDERICK

The stone must be greatly diluted in wine. When you see a white rime has formed around the edge, then it is ready.(beat) But take care not to be wounded, for the power is only medicinal, not surgical.

Frederick hands the BOTTLE to Francis.

FREDERICK

Here is enough to last you another few months.

FRANCIS

I thank you, Frederick. I have been using what you gave me, and I do feel wonderfully well.

FREDERICK

Continue the practice, and you will never fall ill, nor show your true age. (beat) Now I want to show you something else.

Frederick pulls his RED LENS from a pocket and looks through it at the FURNACE, then hands it to Francis.

FREDERICK

The philosopher' stone is the key to open heaven and earth. Through it you can see everything. (beat) Behold!

When Francis peers at the furnace, he is astonished to see an elemental SALAMANDER cavorting in the flames.

SPECIAL EFFECT: SALAMANDER playing in the FURNACE FIRE.

FRANCIS

Incredible! What is that?

FREDERICK

A salamander. Surely, you have heard of them, elementals that live in fire. (beat) Now look outside.

Francis goes to the door and looks through the lens at the garden. To his amazement, several elemental spirits of water, air, and earth are gathered there, watching curiously.

SPECIAL EFFECT: SYLPHS flutter about in the air, FAIRIES dance in the grass, GNOMES peek from behind rocks, and UNDINES splash in a pond.

FREDERICK

All spirits will obey you, for our stone elevates the worthy soul to the highest realms. (beat) You can also know all things past and future, as much as god permits, but not your own death. (beat) And if you look through the lens at another person, you can know their health or illness, and their secrets. All these things and more will be visible to you.

Francis looks at Frederick through the lens.

SPECIAL EFFECT: FREDERICK appears as WHITE LIGHT.

Frederick takes the lens from Francis.

FREDERICK

There is a new outbreak of the black plague in Vienna. I am leaving tomorrow to fight it with elixir. (beat) Will you come with me?

FRANCIS

(reluctantly)

Ummm...

FREDERICK

Do not worry, Francis. No malady can ever afflict you now.

DAYS LATER

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

A CHURCH BELL TOLLS. FREDERICK and FRANCIS, carrying lanterns, walk past a WAGON filled with CORPSES. TWO MEN toss another BODY aboard, then one rings a BELL and yells.

MAN

Bring out the dead! Bring out the dead!

MINUTES LATER

FRANCIS and FREDERICK enter a doorway painted with a red X, sign of the Black Death.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

A MAN and WIFE lay together fully clothed on a bed, clutching their crucifixes. Their faces are spotted with black buboes, and their breathing is labored. FRANCIS holds the lanterns while FREDERICK dribbles elixir from a bottle into their mouths.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

They exit and continue down the street until they find another painted door and enter.

MINUTES LATER

They exit and hurry away as a CHURCH BELL TOLLS.

FREDERICK

We have saved dozens of lives today, Francis. (beat) I pray we could do more, but we must be very careful not to attract attention to ourselves.

FRANCIS

Alas, but it is gratifying to rescue even a few souls from such a horrible death.

FREDERICK

Yes, the elixir is a great gift of God to suffering humanity, yet it is fraught with grave danger. (beat) Only a few years ago, I secretly ministered to victims of the plague here in Vienna. Seventy thousand perished that year, anno domine 1679, and as many again the next. (beat) I was able to restore hundreds of people to health, until one day I was trapped by a mob.

FLASHBACK:

EXT. STREET - DAY

FREDERICK, sporting a beard, is surrounded by a small MOB; JESUIT #1 is among them. Frederick tosses his BOTTLE of elixir to them.

MOB

Medicine! Medicine!

He escapes as they fight over the bottle; JESUIT #1 follows him.

INT. ROOM - DAY

FREDERICK has shaved, changed clothes, and is wearing a wig. He dons a hat, peeks out the window, and exits.

FREDERICK (V.O.)

I gave them what I had, and escaped unharmed, thank god.

RETURN TO SCENE

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

MOB #2 suddenly comes around the corner a block behind them, carrying torches and lanterns. JESUIT #1 is at the front.

JESUIT #1

There they are! They have the
medicine! Seize them!

FREDERICK

Run! Run!

They drop their lanterns and race to the next corner; FREDERICK stops for a moment to throw down his cloak and drop his bottle of medicine on top, then runs. FRANCIS does the same. They reach the next corner just as the mob appears and starts to fight over the bottles and cloaks. JESUIT #1 continues the chase.

MINUTES LATER

FRANCIS and FREDERICK stagger to a halt, exhausted. JESUIT #1 stops and watches from the shadows of a nearby alley.

FREDERICK

(gasping for breath)

Did you see that Jesuit with them?

FRANCIS

Yes, yes.

FREDERICK

Beware of the Jesuits! They are the
lowest form of Christians!

Frederick spits.

FRANCIS

Why do you hate them so?

FREDERICK

Their murderous inquisition
retarded the progress of science
and civilization for two centuries,
and they continue to this day in
secret dungeons. (beat) We could be
sailing among the stars by now,
were it not for those luciferian
whores. (beat) They pretend to be
holy priests, yet they are naught
but walking, talking lumps of demon
shyte, a disgrace to the church and
god.

FRANCIS

I had no idea.

FREDERICK

If ever they torture you, you will get the idea. You will get many ideas! You will say anything they want to hear, lest they stretch and burn and cut you. (beat) And they will do it anyway, for they are cruel, heartless monsters.

Frederick rolls up his sleeve to reveal ugly scars on his arm.

FRANCIS

Good lord! The Jesuits did that to you?

FREDERICK

That and more, a century ago. By the grace of god, I was fortunate to survive, for they did not realize who or what I am, and they released me, but barely alive.

They continue walking, talking inaudibly, followed by the Jesuit.

EXT. INN - NIGHT (ESTABLISHING)

They reach the inn where their horses are stabled. JESUIT #1 still is on their tail.

MINUTES LATER

They are mounted on horseback and ready to leave. JESUIT #1 lurks in the shadows nearby.

FREDERICK

If you will meet me by the Clock Tower at midday next Sunday, we shall continue your education. Meanwhile, farewell, and beware.

FRANCIS

I shall. Godspeed you.

Frederick gallops away. Francis watches till he turns a corner, then departs in another direction. Jesuit #1 steps out of the shadows.

EXT. CLOCK TOWER, PRAGUE - NOON

FRANCIS is waiting at the steps of the Staromestska Radnice (Clock Tower). FREDERICK approaches, dressed like a beggar. Suddenly a coach pulls up beside him;

JESUIT #1 watches from inside as TWO MEN jump out and grab Frederick. Francis tries to stop them, but gets knocked down. The DRIVER points a pistol, keeping him at bay while the kidnappers throw Frederick into the coach.

FREDERICK

Help! Help! Francis! Jesuits! Help!

The coach races away as Francis stands helpless.

INT. WENZEL'S STUDY - DAY

FRANCIS bursts into the room, surprising WENZEL.

FRANCIS

Wenzel! The Jesuits have taken Frederick! We must help him!

WENZEL

Certainly, Francis, but how?

FRANCIS

They have headquarters here in Prague. No doubt they took him there. We must intervene before they torture him to death!

WENZEL

I know the place. But there is no time to appeal to the emperor.

FRANCIS

We must act now, and apologize later. Surely, God and Leopold will forgive us our trespasses.

WENZEL

I will get some men to help us.

FRANCIS

I pray we are not too late.

They rush out of the room.

EXT. JESUIT ESTATE - NIGHT (ESTABLISHING)

WENZEL, FRANCIS, and THREE MEN are sneaking through the Jesuit estate toward the mansion when they hear FREDERICK scream from within a nearby cottage. They hurry over there.

INT. COTTAGE - NIGHT

The cottage is equipped as a torture chamber, dimly lit with lamps. A coal fire burns in a brazier.

FREDERICK is strapped to a table, gasping in agony. JESUIT #1 looms over him, brandishing a red-hot poker. JESUIT #2 sits at a table with quill and paper, ready to take notes.

FREDERICK

(weakly)

Please, there is no need to be brutal. I am too old for this shyte. What do you want me to confess?

JESUIT #1

I do want to hear your confession, master Gualdus. I want to know the preparation of your Philosophers' Stone. (beat) You shall remain here as my guest for as long as it takes to demonstrate the process, so I can be certain it is true.

Jesuit #1 burns Frederick again; he screams and faints.

EXT./INT. COTTAGE - NIGHT

The RESCUERS burst in and assault the JESUITS, knocking them out. FRANCIS dribbles laudanum from a BOTTLE into FREDERICK's mouth while WENZEL releases him.

FRANCIS

Take him to the coach, gently now.
And quiet!

Two men lift Frederick and carry him out, and Francis follows. Wenzel remains behind with the third man.

MAN #3

What of the priests, baron?

WENZEL

Let this be their purgatory.

He spits on JESUIT #1, then kicks over the brazier, and the cottage catches fire.

WENZEL

Amen.

MAN #3

Amen.

They exit.

MINUTES LATER

EXT. COTTAGE - NIGHT

JESUIT #1 runs out screaming with his clothes aflame as others come running to the scene.

EXT./INT. COACH - NIGHT

The coach rattles down the road, followed by the horsemen.

FREDERICK

Wash wash in that alcool? It tastes like laudanum.

FRANCIS

Yes, Frederick, the juice of poppies, to ease the pain. I remembered what you told me about Alexander Seton, and came prepared.

FREDERICK

Good shinking, Francis! (beat) You shaved me from his misherble fate. You are my Shendivo!

WENZEL

Who? What is he babbling about?

FRANCIS

Michael Sendivo. (beat) He rescued Alexander Seton the Cosmopolite, about eighty years ago, during the reign of emperor Rudolf. It is a long story.

FREDERICK

(yawning)
I am so sleepy.

He passes out on Francis' shoulder.

WENZEL

You say he is a master of alchemy? He looks like a beggar, and talks like a lunatic!

FRANCIS

Yes, he is a true master, and he wears many disguises. (beat) I have also seen him dress most elegantly, and speak with great eloquence.

They fall silent and watch as Frederick snores and moans intermittently.

DAYS LATER

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

FREDERICK is resting in bed, his wounds bandaged. WENZEL and FRANCIS enter.

FRANCIS

Good morning, Frederick! How very good it is to see you awake again! You have slept three days, and resurrected! (beat) All of our prayers have been for your recovery.

FREDERICK

Francis, my friend! And baron Seyler! Greetings! (beat) I cannot thank you enough for rescuing me. That Jesuit hellhole might have been my grave, if they would even bother themselves to bury me.

WENZEL

The place is but than a pile of ashes now. We burnt it down.

FREDERICK

Ah, good, good! (beat) Baron Seyler, you are living proof that god the alchemist works with cracked crucibles. You appear to be a vessel of such divine folly, wiser than men.

WENZEL

Ummm... I...

FREDERICK

You have proved the reality of the Philosophers' Stone to the Holy Roman Emperor and many others, so now it is a fact of history. (beat) Henceforth, science must organize around alchemy. (beat) I congratulate you for that happy accident, and for surviving to this day. It is no small feat.

WENZEL

I am very thankful to you, master Gualdus, for my good fortune.

Otherwise, I would be a miserable, hopeless Franciscan friar or worse, a priest.

FREDERICK

Indeed. (beat) But please, do call me Frederick, not master, nor Gualdus. It is both embarrassing and dangerous.

WENZEL

Yes, Frederick, sir. And likewise, please call me Wenzel.

FREDERICK

Very well, then, I shall.

Frederick yawns, and grimaces with pain.

FRANCIS

Should I administer some laudanum for your pain?

FREDERICK

Yes, please, but only a little daub around my wounds. It is not wise to consume much of it, for one can easily become dependant on it, and die from an excess.

FRANCIS

I shall return in a moment with a nurse for you.

WENZEL

And I must attend to some affairs of state, if you will excuse me.

Frederick yawns again as he nods, and they exit. Wenzel is visibly relieved.

EXT. WENZEL'S ESTATE - WINTER EVENING (ESTABLISHING)

Snow falls as the sun sets.

INT. LIBRARY - NIGHT

FREDERICK and FRANCIS are seated at a table studying the alchemical books and manuscripts spread before them, illuminated by candles. Logs burn in the fireplace.

FREDERICK

And thus the arcanum of mercury. It is a symbolic, an esoteric principle, but not an ingredient of the great work. We use common quicksilver only to manufacture gold, and never in the preparation of our elixir.

FRANCIS

If not mercury, what then is the true substance of the philosophers' stone, pray tell?

FREDERICK

Ahhh... That is the crux of our art. (beat) I promised to teach you, however, so I shall reveal it. (beat) Remember our sacred vow of secrecy.

FRANCIS

I do swear it, upon my very life.

FREDERICK

Indeed. (beat) Alchemists call it by every name, but properly it is known as gur.

FRANCIS

Gur? Gur? I have never heard of such a thing. Will you explain it to me?

FREDERICK

Gur is a mysterious vapor, exhaled by the earth at night. All the metals derive from it. (beat) I suppose I shall have to show you. We must rise before dawn to find it if we can, for it is elusive, and cannot withstand the light of day.

EXT. FIELD - FULL MOON - WINTER NIGHT

FREDERICK and FRANCIS, warmly dressed, are standing beside a BASKET containing a CORKED GLASS BOTTLE, BOWL, and FUNNEL. Frederick points to a glistening GELATINOUS BLOB that lays on the SNOW.

FREDERICK

That is pure gur, our virgin water. Only in winter can it be found thus, coagulated on snow.

At other times, we must collect dew
at night before it touches the
earth and drains away.

SERIES OF SHOTS:

FRANCIS watches as FREDERICK scoops up the gur with the glass bowl, funnels it into the bottle, and corks it. Francis carries it to their CARRIAGE at the edge of the field, and they drive away.

INT. LABORATORY - DAY

FREDERICK

I prefer the short dry path for the great work, but the wet way is very beautiful to watch, if one has the time for it. (beat) The dry way can be completed within a week, in one crucible, with a few minerals and salts. But it is a very great secret, known to a few masters.

FRANCIS

But gur is watery. Frederick. Is this then the wet path we are following?

FREDERICK

It is, Francis. (beat) I cannot, will not make this too easy for you. Make haste slowly, and be very careful if you would survive and prosper as an adept. (beat) Why, just to sell alchemical gold can be dangerous! Only a few years ago in Paris...

FLASHBACK:

INT. GOLDSMITH'S SHOP - MORNING

GOLDSMITH #2 is examining some jewelry when FREDERICK enters.

GOLDSMITH #2

Good morning, monsieur. How may I help you?

FREDERICK

I would like to sell some gold.

Frederick opens his pouch and pulls out a small bar of gold. The goldsmith rubs it on a touchstone, sniffs and licks it, then examines it with a lens, frowning all the while.

GOLDSMITH #2

This gold is made by alchemy!

FREDERICK

Whatever makes you think so,
monsieur?

GOLDSMITH #2

I know the gold from every mine in
Europe. This is better than all of
them! (beat) You could be hung for
this felony!

FREDERICK

Monsieur, you are mistaken! This
gold came from America, and it
perfectly natural and legitimate! I
have the receipt for it in my
saddlebag. Wait a moment while I
fetch it.

GOLDSMITH #2

Yes, please show me.

Frederick exits.

MOMENTS LATER

INT./EXT. GOLDSMITH'S SHOP - DAY

GOLDSMITH #2 watches from the window as FREDERICK hurries
away, and laughs as he hefts the bar of gold.

RETURN TO SCENE

INT. LABORATORY - DAY

FREDERICK slowly pumps the bellows as he speaks.

FREDERICK

I possess enough wealth to buy
everything this world has to sell,
yet I cannot use it, thanks to the
wickedness of men. (beat) Alas, I
am so weary of this lonely life,
shut out like Cain from family and
friends. (beat) Yet some day, gold
will be as common as dirt. Then we
masters of alchemy may find rest
and peace of mind.

Frederick falls silent and stares at the retort as FRANCIS
watches him.

YEARS LATER

EXT. MANSION - NIGHT (ESTABLISHING)

MAP & CAPTION: "AUSTERLITZ, MORAVIA... 1726 A.D."

A WOLF HOWLS in the distance; an OWL HOOTS nearby. FRANCIS is seated at a desk in his study, visible through an open window on the second floor.

INT. STUDY - FULL MOON NIGHT

FRANCIS appears to be about 40 years old. He has just finished writing a MANUSCRIPT by the light of a CANDELABRA, and places a QUILL PEN in its INK POT. A large DOG sleeps by the window. A copy of MAGNALIA NATURAE lays on the desk beside a small GOLD BOX, its lid open, filled with softly glowing lumps of RED PHILOSOPHERS STONE. Francis picks up the page and reads it.

FRANCIS (V.O.)

In the summer of anno domine 1718, newspapers in the Netherlands reported the death of one Frederick Gualdus, who drowned in the river Scheldt. His body was not found.

FLASHBACK:

EXT. RIVER DOCK - DAWN

FREDERICK is sitting in a ROWBOAT loaded with a FISHING POLE and BAIT BUCKET. Young JAN unties the rope, tosses it aboard, and gives a shove. Frederick start rowing.

FREDERICK

Thank you, Jan! (beat) I shall return by midday.

JAN

Farewell till then, herr Gualdus!

Frederick fades into the FOG.

MINUTES LATER

FREDERICK stops rowing and drops a stone anchor overboard, then blows softly on a WHISTLE. Another whistle responds.

FRANCIS (O.S.)

Hello, Frederick!

FREDERICK

I'm here!

FRANCIS (O.S.)
Keep talking till I find you!

FREDERICK
Ummm. (beat) A Christian, a Jew,
and a Muslim walked into a tavern.
The owner said, what is this, a
jest?

FRANCIS emerges from the mist and pulls his boat alongside.

FRANCIS
Good morning, Frederick! Was that
supposed to be funny?

FREDERICK
Hail, Francis! (beat) Yes, it was,
once upon a time. (beat) Hold the
boats together, please. I do not
want to fall in the water.

He climbs into Francis' boat, and they row away.

RETURN TO SCENE

FRANCIS continues reading.

FRANCIS (V.O.)
Frederick taught me very well, and
by the grace of God, I attained the
blessed Stone of the Philosophers
that same year.

He pauses to gaze at the lumps of RED GLASS in the GOLD BOX.

FLASHBACK:

EXT. RUINS - DAY

FRANCIS is burying a small copper box in the corner of an
ancient ruin.

FRANCIS (V.O.)
Even if you do not know the secret
of our art, perhaps you can find it
buried somewhere, as did Wenzel
Seyler, because the master
alchemists have hidden it in many
places.

RETURN TO SCENE

INT. STUDY - NIGHT

FRANCIS continues reading.

FRANCIS

As for Wenzel Seyler: he lived
happily ever after. (beat) And so
have I.

Beautiful wife SOPHIA enters, dressed in her nightgown.

SOPHIA

Francis, dearest, do come to bed
now. It is very late, and you know
I cannot go to sleep without you.

FRANCIS

Yes, Sophia my love. I am finished
here.

Sophia withdraws, leaving the door ajar. FRANCIS sighs,
stands, picks up the candelabra, and exits, closing the door
behind him.

EXT. MANSION - NIGHT

The lights go out in the bedroom. JESUIT #1, now old and
badly scarred by burns, steps from behind a tree and gestures
to the BURGLAR who accompanies him. The man heads toward the
mansion.

MINUTES LATER

EXT. MANSION - NIGHT

The BURGLAR has climbed up the ivy-covered wall and reached
the open window of Francis' study, but falls to the ground
with a scream and a sickening crunch as the DOG barks and
lunges at him.

BURGLAR

Eeeyaahhh!

JESUIT #1

Damnation!

He sneaks away into the darkness.

MOMENTS LATER

FRANCIS leans out the window beside the barking DOG.

FRANCIS

Hush, Leopold! Good dog!

KLAUS the gardener comes running with a lantern and holds it over the body. He looks up at Francis and shakes his head.

KLAUS
He is dead!

FRANCIS
Klaus, go fetch the magistrate, and
a priest.

KLAUS
Jahvohl, meister.

Francis shakes his head in disgust and shuts the window.

INT. STUDY - NIGHT

FRANCIS closes the door behind him.

CLOSE UP : GOLD BOX with pieces of RED PHILOSOPHERS STONE,
glowing in the moonlight.

FADE OUT.